

# **Rebel Cities**

**Radical Municipalism**

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# **Rebel Cities 1: “Marielle Franco Presente!” (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)**

“How many more deaths will be needed in order to end this war?”

These were a few of the final words written Mar. 13 on Twitter by Marielle Franco, a day before her assassination. The 38-year-old city councillor from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was later shot alongside her driver Anderson Pedro Gomes.

The murder of the Socialism and Liberty Party politician, sociologist, single mother and openly bisexual woman from one of Brazil’s most deprived favelas, Maré, has since reverberated around the world. Evidence suggests police involvement.

Marielle was a leading light in Brazil’s Feminist Spring, a new generation of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous women fighting back against Brazil’s intensifying attacks against people of color, women, LGBT people and other oppressed communities.

Her shocking murder begged the question: Did the police kill Marielle? The councillor’s last tweet accused the police of murdering a poor black man named Matheus Melo after he left a church in Rio’s Jacarezinho favela.

## **Police Violence at its Worst**

Marielle spent her adult life resisting the police war on the Afro-Brazilian community, something that had been legitimised as the “war on drugs”. In fact, Brazil’s death toll in this war exceeds the lives lost in Syria and Afghanistan during official wars.

In 2016 alone, more than 4,200 people were killed by the Brazilian police. Ten percent of all homicides worldwide happen in Brazil. The war on drugs has meant a military and state police occupation of favelas, and incarceration for many people of color.

Even before her election as Rio city councillor in October 2016, Marielle was an ardent critic of police violence. Since 2008, she worked for City Hall investigating militias in which police were tied to homicide. As councillor, she coordinated a commission monitoring state troop actions in the favelas, an issue that has elevated Brazil’s hard-right government. Alongside motive and their track record for murder, evidence substantiates police involvement.

## **March 14**

While returning from a women’s event on the evening of Mar. 14, two cars pulled up behind Marielle’s vehicle. The location seemed pre-determined. It was a CCTV blind-spot. Nine bullets were fired. Four of them killed Marielle.

Bullet casings show they were police issue 9mm rounds. These trace to a batch of ammunition stolen in 2006, and were also directly connected to a massacre near São Paulo in 2015 in which three police officers and a municipal guard were convicted of murder.

The scene of Marielle's murder was soon covered in flowers and messages, including "Black Lives Matter" and "Police kill". Thousands of mourners marched from her home favela of Maré, and many more filled Rio's streets, across Brazil and the world. A unifying call was "Marielle Presente!"

In the aftermath, global figures co-signed an open letter calling for an "independent commission comprised of prominent and respected national and international human rights and legal experts and tasked with carrying out an independent investigation of the murder."

## **"Being a Black Woman is to Resist and Survive All the Time." — Marielle Franco**

Fighting against systemic violence led Marielle into politics. After a friend from the favelas was murdered, she started campaigning for the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL). In an interview, she explained: "Incursions in the favelas were growing, weaponry and public security debate came to the fore."

In 2006, she used the slogan: "I do not want my money in the caveirão [militarization], I want my money in education."

Marielle studied sociology, taking part in new opportunities for night courses that were open to anyone. The cohort around her became dubbed the "favela intellectuals". Her reason to stand for the 2016 elections relates to her campaign slogan: "Eu sou porque nos somos." ("I am because we are.")

In March 2016, when a key activist couldn't attend a meeting because her own house was being demolished, Marielle asserted: "We need to have women in various spaces to defend our lives."

## **Brazil's Coup vs. Feminist Spring**

Since the coup that year that brought Michael Temer to power after deposing President Dilma Rousseff, Brazil has regressed back toward its military dictatorship era, including firing live ammunition against peaceful protesters.

"Their 'new era' for Brazil was austerity, neoliberalism and privatization – with rocket-boosters," writes Vanessa Baird for New Internationalist Magazine. In the months since, laws against abortions and violence against women and the LGBT community have increased. The number of rapes in São Paulo rose by 38 percent after the coup.

Marielle saw abortion rights as an intersectional issue. "Black women make up the majority of victims of rape," she said. "So, when I fight for [access to] legal abortion, I'm also fighting for the slums."

In Rio's city council, Marielle's many initiatives included night-time "day-care" to enable young mothers to work and study, as she had. She battled for rights to the city for all, including access to transport, healthcare and education services. One change she supported was for night buses to stop more often in order to reduce the risk of rape and violence. In the autumn, she planned to run for Vice-Governor of Rio State.

In her death, Marielle is being immortalized as a global human rights icon. But as she made clear, she co-led a participative movement.

## **Brazil's Feminist Spring**

Marielle's journey is part of an intersectional Feminist Spring, with momentum that formed from Brazil's 2013 protests against neoliberal attacks and social exclusion. Four months after Temer's coup, Marielle and 30 other women of similar backgrounds broke into the electoral arena, winning seats in city halls across the country.

Aurea Carolina is one example: She first broke the glass ceiling in Belo Horizonte's hip-hop world before doing the same thing in Brazil's fourth largest city hall. Samia Bomfim became the youngest elected councilwoman in the city of São Paulo after working as a leading activist since 2013. In Niterói, a town near Rio, Talíria Petrone was the most voted-for candidate.

All these women are from PSOL. At the municipal level, they work through democratic participation, a thread running through the global rebel cities movement. For their communication, online tools are essential, including the use of live web broadcasts.

Notably, the movement links to – and has been out in front of – the global feminist movement. For example, Brazil saw its viral #MeuPrimeiroAssedio (#MyFirstHarassment) movement start in 2015, several years before the #MeToo campaign took off in the United States.

Intersectional feminism also connects with a broader feminist surge in Brazil, organized specifically against Temer with presidential elections on the horizon later this year.

One expression of Brazil's intersectional feminism was an open letter calling for the Feminist Spring to amplify through the PSOL. The letter, co-signed by Marielle along with other previously mentioned PSOL candidates, said:

“The current moment demands an intersectional feminist policy that identifies the interactions of different forms of domination and discrimination with power structures and that captures the consequences of patriarchy, sexism, racism and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.”

It continued:

“The '99% Feminism' is a synthesis of a type of feminism that connects women's struggle to anti-capitalist struggle processes on a global scale, much inspired by the manifestations that emerged in 2011, from the 99% slogan against social inequality incarnated in the 1% that concentrates the global wealth.”



# **Rebel Cities 2: Rojava Shows Pathway Towards A Common Humanity (Rojava, Northern Syria)**

Rojava is a world-leading experiment in democracy emerging from the ashes of the Syrian War. The predominantly Kurdish region has created a new political model based on participatory local councils holding sovereignty. Through democratic confederalism a new civic identity is forming, and to understand its significance, one needs to realize an essential part of the Kurdish story is persecution.

NATO member Turkey, and ISIS, are committing war crimes against Rojava. Turkey has increased its oppression of Kurds in Turkey, particularly since 2015. Throughout history, Kurds have been persecuted. Attempts to build a Kurdish state have thus far failed. The impact of these two factors greatly explain what emerged in Rojava after 2012 when people became sovereign through peaceful revolution.

## **Answering The Kurdish Question: A New Identity**

“My Kurdish identity has no value unless I do something” said Abdullah Öcalan, one of the ideological inspirations for the Rojava Revolution and a key figure in the story of Kurdish nationalism. Öcalan led the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) until his detention and solitary confinement by Turkey in 1999.

From prison, Öcalan’s political journey has guided Rojava. Once a Marxist freedom fighter who wanted to create a Kurdistan through guerrilla warfare, he transformed himself into an advocate of bottom-up municipal democracy. Since the early 2000s, Öcalan asserted that liberation for the Kurds must mean democracy for everyone.

Öcalan was influenced by other thinkers, most notably Murray Bookchin, an advocate of libertarian municipalism. Öcalan rejected fighting for a Kurdish state, arguing all this effectively means is that the police repressing you speak your language.

The failure of the PKK guerilla warfare against Turkey was another motivation for the shift in thinking. Ironically, after the PKK ideologically converted to self-defence and radical democracy, it was added to the world’s terrorist list. Turkish lobbying was crucial to this process.

Öcalan’s historical interpretation called for democratic confederalism as a dual power against the modern state. The problem with the state, he said, was that it was built on oppression – not least male domination and class oppression dating back 5,000 years. Women’s empowerment and local democracy provide a remedy. Democratic confederalism is a system of local councils where autonomy is held at the lowest level, something realized in Rojava since 2012.

Although Öcalan has no institutional control in Rojava, his ideas and their execution have flourished there.

## Rojava: Turning Theories Into Practice

Northern Syria was a relative safe haven for Kurds in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ideas and people moved in from Kurdish Turkey, including democratic confederalism. In 2004, the peace was shattered when the Syrian state massacred Kurds in Qamişlo [today's Rojava].

Syrian repression strengthened the Kurds' necessity for self-defence, a pillar of democratic confederalism. This catalysed the formation of secret democratic revolutionary local councils, including women's Yekîtiya Star. These councils grew into the participatory architecture of Rojava.

One self-defence element includes the peace and justice commissions, where justice is administered by local people based on reconciliation. Rojava exemplifies do-it-yourself culture, not least in every aspect of self-defence. Everyone in society receives basic training in Asayîs, enabling them to perform the function of the police, although they are accountable directly to the local councils, not to the state.

Eventually, Rojava wants to abolish having dedicated Asayîs, training each individual to take responsibility for security. To defend themselves against ISIS, Turkey and other attacks, the people of Rojava have also formed self-defence forces, which are mixed and all women.

Writing about the myth surrounding the women fighters of Rojava, Meral Çiçek, from the Kurdish Women's Relations office in Erbil, explains:

“...Self-defence also means to be a subject, to fight back, to say no and to act. It's an action...women's self-defence in Rojava and elsewhere is not only about protecting yourself with a weapon against armed attacks. In a deeper sense: It's also not only about defence. It's about creating. Creating life. A new life. An alternative live. And all the women who today defend their country, their people, themselves, their dreams and their project of a new future are at the same time subjects of this creation process.”

Bookchin, Öcalan and the whole democratic confederalist experiment in Rojava calls for living within nature so that the land – like the people – is not exploited. This connects back to Kurdish ties to Zoroastrianism, an old way of living in harmony with nature.

Self-reliance makes sense for any society, but it has been particularly necessary for Rojava, which finds itself surrounded by hostile enemies and often under embargo. Rojava's survival also rests on a third element relating to the new all-inclusive identity. The cultural mosaic of Rojava can be seen in the formation of a new university in Qamislo. Like the Rojava constitution, the university is open to all, including Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Syriacs, Armenians, Turkmen and Chechens.

Local councils rely on participation based on the idea that identity means action. The people of Rojava, in every neighbourhood, have created a web of nine councils that look after everything from education to security, and from setting up workers' cooperatives to providing welfare. In modern capitalists states, NGOs do the work that the state fails to do, for instance feeding the homeless or protecting vulnerable people. In Rojava, there is no state; instead, NGOs do everything, controlled democratically from below.

The ethnic inclusivity of Rojava also means that it has changed its name. It is now the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS). 'Rojava' is Kurdish. For the same reason the crucial women's movement, Yekîtiya Star, became Kongreya Star. DFNS also welcomes all refugees from

surrounding war-torn Syria, respects every international human rights law, and offers a peaceful solution for the whole of Syria. Many consider it a crime against humanity that DFNS has been excluded from peace talks by imperial state powers.

## **DFNS and a Global Radical Municipalism**

Rojava is unique, yet it reflects a wider radical municipalist movement. Similarly, Turkey's Erdoğan can be compared to the march of ultra-nationalist, authoritarian, misogynistic leaders. The municipal space is a key battleground against this kind of leadership. Examples include Brazilian intersectional feminists and networks, and city halls in Spain. In the U.S., town halls have become a key place to register discontent and to fight back against Trump. On a pan-European scale, cities pushed the Refugees Welcome campaign as a way of taking on growing state-supported anti-migrant sentiment.

All radical municipal projects, not least Rojava, are built independently on their own ideological foundations. They germinate from the social movements and their own contexts. But similarly, they respond to globalized crises. In practice, these movements are based on collective action and they build progressive identities as they challenge systemic oppression and injustice. Radical municipalism reimagines a common humanity, something exemplified in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.

# **Rebel Cities 3: Zapatistas Are Still Trailblazing Worlds Beyond Neoliberalism (Chiapas, Mexico)**

Everything changed New Year's Day 1994, when Zapatistas took autonomous control of their land in Chiapas, southern Mexico. This coincided with implementation of NAFTA, one footnote in a long history of colonialism, exploitation and injustice against the people of the Western Hemisphere. The Zapatistas are part of a rich vein of resistance, and one of the most important in recent times, reaching far beyond Mexico.

## **Ya Basta! (Enough Already)**

On January 1, 1994, Subcomandante Ana Maria led the Zapatistas – indigenous people, one-third of them women, wearing ski masks and carrying mostly wooden replica guns – to capture the town of San Cristobal. In doing so, the group reclaimed land across Chiapas. Twelve days of fighting and 100 deaths later, the Mexican state agreed to a ceasefire.

Peace talks followed, and both sides signed the San Andres Accords, in 1996, although the Mexican government never fulfilled its commitments. Skirmishes continue until today, but the indigenous people maintain their autonomy. It is not only a story of armed rebellion. Zapatismo power is more about words than guns.

Globally, neoliberalism peaked in arrogance in the mid-1990s. The Zapatistas dispelled any argument that “there is no alternative”. They showed the world a third way: co-creating power from the bottom up. Their path diverged from the centralization of power inherent in state-oriented capitalist and communist systems. The journey continues.

### **\*\*\*Building Autonomy**

Within Zapatismo, creating autonomy means every “world” has its place, respecting indigenous customs and knowledge. The Women's Revolutionary Law was passed two years before the Zapatistas reclaimed their land, and the 10-point charter made women's liberation central to the new order.

They rejected “bad government” – meaning Mexican state handouts, programs, services and interference. Instead, the land was divided into five autonomous areas, known as “caracoles”, or snails, under the mantra: “We go slowly, as we go far”.

These self-governing units provide schools, teaching in both indigenous and Spanish languages; and they provide healthcare based in both indigenous and Western knowledge. Economically, cooperatives form a strong part of the economy – not least producing coffee. Community banking is created through credit unions. The whole Zapatista region has around 250,000 inhabitants, covering roughly a third of Chiapas. Neighbouring peoples can also access services.

The rebel zone divides into 27 Rebel Zapatistas Autonomous Municipalities. These run on world-leading participatory democratic ideals, namely “mandar obedeciendo” (to lead by obeying). Local representatives rotate regularly, and they aim at gender parity. Being a representative is an unpaid honor, but one is fed by the community.

## **Forerunners in The Municipal Fight Against Neoliberalism**

The Zapatistas said NAFTA would be the “death certificate” for rural Mexicans. In most respects they were right, as cheap U.S. exports decimated farmers’ livelihoods, creating much of the exodus that stoked the current U.S. immigration debate.

Media savvy, and fighting neoliberalism with an alternative system of their own, the Zapatistas have been called the “first postmodern revolution”. They rose up during a worldwide anti-globalization movement resisting organisations like the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. This neoliberal architecture pushed what has become austerity and other free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and its European counterpart, TTIP.

Amid the anti-globalization rage and resistance, the Zapatistas showed an example of how to create counter-power. They showed participative democracy in action as their political philosophy asserted women’s liberation and worked through consensus. Fast-forward to the 2011 Squares movements that emerged around the Global North after the 2008 crisis – from Spain’s 15M to Occupy to Germany’s Blockupy – and Zapatismo were influential in re-imagining politics in the Global North.

“As soon as I arrived I saw that many of the principles, language, themes and ways of organizing Occupy Wall Street had been taken straight from Zapatista philosophy,” Rebecca Manski, an Occupy Wall Street supporter, told Al Jazeera in 2014 after visiting a Zapatista summer school.

In the European context, the post-15M movement has gone furthest toward creating a radical municipal future. Spain’s popular councils are women-led and an example of participative local democracy, where people literally “lead by obeying”. Some of the Spanish rebel cities’ first measures after 2011 were to level local governments – cutting representatives’ salaries, for instance, and moving toward the Chiapas model.

Grounding the struggle locally and simultaneously reaching out for solidarity elsewhere explains Zapatista resilience, and is a thread in emerging radical municipalism. It engages international solidarity while building local counter-power. This diverges from classic leftist class struggle, which is more exclusive, often focusing on working class men and leaving aside other oppressed communities, thereby gaining less support.

The overarching approach of the Zapatistas is the call for intersectional solidarity. One example is when Zapatistas spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos was called gay in the mid-1990s, a supposed attack by pro-Mexican detractors. He responded: “Yes, Marcos is gay. Marcos is gay in San Francisco, Black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains.”

## **Preguntando Caminamos (Asking While We Walk)**

The Zapatistas evolution shows how their democracy is all about the journey, not the destination. From the outset, the Zapatistas were clear they only resorted to violence to protect their lives. After the peace accords failed, they opted to unilaterally push for autonomy, using self-defence against the Mexican state while implementing the caracoles. Snails are a slow moving symbol. They detached the armed community from democratic structures.

More recently, the Zapatistas have renounced all violence, as Mexico has been ravaged by the continent-wide so-called “War on Drugs”. Another success of Zapatismo is keeping the drugs and state incursions out of their parts of Chiapas.

With this shift, the Zapatistas changed tact on political engagement. They supported the campaign for María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, an indigenous healer from X nation to run in the parliamentary race, known as Marichuy.

Marichuy, a representative of the Mexican government’s Indigenous Council election platform, wasn’t aiming to win. It wanted primarily to build solidarity against violence to women and the threat extractive industries pose to indigenous communities.

On an election tour for Marichuy, only women spoke, including indigenous women from across Mexico and a subcomandante from the Zapatistas. The campaign message, which offered solidarity across Mexican society to everyone facing the destruction and destitution levelled by the capitalist system, remained grounded in the indigenous fight.

Marichuy asserted: “We need to amplify and strengthen the organizational structure of our rage and pain, so that throughout the country, we make the earth tremble at its center and allow the survival of the native peoples and the reconstruction of a Mexico that has been intentionally torn apart by those who have the power.”

## **Rebel Cities 4: In Warsaw, “Rights to the City” Means Clean Air and Affordable Homes (Warsaw, Poland)**

“We fight for a fair, more resident-friendly and greener city, which follows the principles of sustainable development,” explained Justyna Kościńska, board member of Warsaw’s municipalist organization *Miasto jest Nasze*.

*Miasto jest Nasze* means City is Ours. Started in 2013 by social activists, it is now a urban movement spreading from the capital across Poland.

Kościńska continued: “Since 2013, City is Ours has been actively searching for solutions to problems such as chaotic urban planning and architectural policy, and the deficiencies of the transport network and infrastructure in this rapidly developing city.”

### **Rights to the City**

City is Ours is not a political party, but a bottom-up organization with a diverse membership. In November 2014, the group backed candidates in Warsaw’s local government elections, winning three districts. The capital’s next municipal elections are this November.

The City is Ours connects to the premise of Rights to the City, coined by Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book “*Le droit à la ville*”. More recently, Marxist geographer-anthropologist David Harvey has championed the movement.

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city...the freedom to make and remake our cities,” writes Harvey.

The Right to the City is a core ingredient in the radical municipalist movement now spreading across cities worldwide, driven by local issues. In Brazil, for instance, the Right to the City is particularly concerned with empowering women and Afro-Brazilians against institutional oppression. In broader terms, however, it is about social inclusion, reimagining cities as spaces for political transformation and political engagement.

Two of Warsaw’s most notable, unfulfilled rights remain clean air and affordable housing.

### **Clearing Warsaw’s Smog**

Polish cities suffer from poor air quality. World Health Organisation data shows that 33 of Europe’s 50 most polluted cities are Polish. Nationwide, the pollution is attributed to 45,000 premature deaths.

One problem is the Polish far-right government's "love-in" with coal. Similar perhaps to Donald Trump's message to beleaguered coal mining communities in America, the Polish government has explicitly said that "burning coal is patriotic".

This is a bad omen for this year's annual climate summit, hosted in the smog-ridden Polish city of Katowice. But the Right to the City challenges the national direction.

"The need to protect the natural environment is a lesson which the municipal authorities and the general public have yet to learn in Poland," said Kościńska.

In Warsaw, City is Ours has been monitoring the increasing smog levels and showing its impact. In 2015, the group even organized the spectacle, "Warsaw Marathon Against Air Pollution," running the Marathon in anti-pollution masks.

"[In March 2017] we created a website and a fake pop-up store in the city center with cigarettes for children," added Kościńska. "It was commented on by major mainstream media outlets. We revealed later that kids do not need to smoke cigarettes because as residents of Warsaw they already "smoke" a pack of cigarettes every month due to the city's heavy air pollution."

For two weeks afterwards, using the same space, City is Ours organized an information hub about air pollution. Every day the group offered solutions, hosted workshops and debates, and even gave away house plants in an effort to improve and educate people about air quality.

The smog situation worsened again this past January. As a result, City is Ours teamed up with Akcja Demokracja (Operation Democracy) to petition the European Commission with over 18,000 signatures decrying Poland's dirty air.

## **Warsaw's Housing Dilemma**

Warsaw's history explains its housing situation. Once one of Europe's spectacular capitals, the city was ruined by World War II, which killed 700,000 residents. Jewish and other targeted communities faced genocide. A successful uprising against the Nazis went unsupported by allies, and was crushed. Warsaw next faced the Soviet occupation, and in 1945, 90 percent of its houses were destroyed.

In the late 1940s, Warsaw was rebuilt with many drab, Soviet-style social housing blocks. A half century later, liberation after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe gave Warsaw respite from Soviet oppression. But new problems surfaced. Soviet law offered compensation to people who had lost their homes, although it was rarely awarded.

In the ensuing years, street plans have changed, meaning that previous house plots now straddle many new properties. Worse, the law has led to massive abuse, as many Warsaw residents have been thrown out of their homes by a landlord mafia that falsely "re-privatized" properties, sometimes buying property deeds from elderly people for tiny sums before claiming their full value, among other bogus schemes.

## **Reclaiming Warsaw**

Warsaw's housing mafia use intimidation tactics to evict residents. The murder of housing activist Jolanta Brzeska, whose body was found burnt in the woods near Warsaw in 2011, drew attention to the housing-corruption crisis. Today, Jolanta graffiti symbolizes resistance.



In 2014, the City is Ours created a map of the “re-privatisation”. One property mogul suspected of gaining immense wealth unsuccessfully sued to remove the map’s publication. Kościńska told Occupy.com:

“We created this map to try to show the connections between some of the representatives in City Hall and the real estate businessmen. For the first time, the problem of uncontrolled landownership was showed in a complex and compact way. Nearly 40,000 people visited our website and it received a large amount of media coverage.”

Speaking to the Financial Times, City is Ours board member Piotr Micula explained: “A year ago, a politician could go on TV and say openly that Warsaw does not have a problem with smog. Now the social awareness is higher, no one can deny the problem... We live in the world of spreading fake news, and these kind of tools can help fight it.”

## **Rebel Cities 2.0**

In July, Warsaw will host Fearless Cities, an international gathering started last year by the forerunners of radical municipalism, Barcelona En Comu.

The movements show how cities are a vital space for new, transformative politics. For the City is Ours, one specific aspect is seeing the city as a space beyond party politics.

“Many cities in Poland are ruled by political parties, but we think cities should be free of political parties. Residents should decide what happens in the city. Local authorities would serve the public good and would answer to the real needs of the citizens, and not to particular interests of political parties and business alone,” said Kościńska.

# **Rebel Cities 5: Bologna Again Takes Center Stage Resisting Italian Fascism (Bologna, Italy)**

“Anti-fascist laws are often ignored or not sufficiently enforced in our country,” Councillor Emily Clancy, from Coalizione Civica in Bologna, told Occupy.com.

Normalizing fascism is a global crisis. But through active municipalism, Coalizione Civica (Civic Coalition) is challenging Italy’s far-right lurch. Formed in 2015, the municipalist platform won two seats in 2016 city council elections. Selecting its candidates through a public vote, it pushes other radical municipalist values such as rights to the city, ecological sustainability and social inclusion.

Bologna in northern Italy has a history of resisting fascism. It also suffered the worst post-WWII fascist attack, in 1980, when terrorists bombed the city train station killing 85 people. During WWII, Bologna’s male and female partigiani (partisans) earned the city the Gold Medal of resistance fighting against Benito Mussolini, Italy’s dictator from 1922 to 1945.

## **Current Context**

After the March 2018 election, the far-right Lega Nord and the populist, ideologically ambiguous 5-Star Movement formed a coalition. Their first plans included creating more detention centers for refugees and migrants, carrying out more deportations, and further criminalizing mosques and the already demonized Roma communities.

“Regardless of whether their coalition survives or falls apart in a few months, the two parties have already won in Italy the kind of “cultural war” promoted globally by Steve Bannon,” explained Italian anthropologist Vito Laterza about the nation’s latest step toward a dystopian future.

It seems, however, that the coalition is already falling apart. Following President Sergio Mattarella’s veto of a Eurosceptic finance minister, which prompted the resignation of the prime minister-in-waiting, the president appointed an ex-IMF official to lead a technocratic government. But there is no assurance from either party that they’ll confirm his choice. New elections are pencilled in for the autumn.

As the former finance minister of Greece, Yanis Varoufakis, pointed out, the new Italian government was censored by the president not for its far-right anti-migrant policies, but its opposition to the Eurozone – something that will likely play into the far-right’s hand, strengthening its position if and when new elections go ahead.

The recent election campaign catalyzed the modern march of fascism in Italy, a story that ties to Bologna’s history and its ongoing resistance.

## An Anti-Fascist City

“During the last national electoral campaign, Roberto Fiore, the leader of the extremist political group Forza Nuova, held a speech in one of Bologna’s city center’s squares,” Councillor Clancy explained. Fiore was a fugitive following the 1980 rail station massacre. Afterwards, Britain refused to extradite him to face criminal charges in Italy.

From the UK, he co-founded Forza Nuova in 1997 and returned to Italy two years later, after the legal charges had expired. When Fiore’s fascist rally went ahead in Bologna on Feb. 17, a fortnight before the election, more than 1,000 antifascist protesters showed up to try to prevent it.

Coalizione Civica was active organizing this and other anti-fascist rallies in recent months. Under Italian law, a rally like Forza Nuova’s should be illegal. On Mar. 26, a motion initiated by the Coalition passed in the Bologna city council which made sure the city upheld the law and kept fascists banned from civic places.

“It was crucial to amend the city’s regulations on public space and say those that break our Constitution and other anti-fascist laws will be denied any request for the city’s public spaces and squares,” Clancy said.

The rally in Bologna came after another crucial event that was thought to have propelled the Lega into government. On Feb. 4, six people of African descent were wounded in an act of fascist terrorism in Macerata, central Italy. The perpetrator, Luca Traini, was involved in fascist militias and had run as a Lega candidate in 2017 elections.

As Occupy.com reported, Lega defended this atrocity and used it to gain further electoral support by fueling hatred against immigrants and refugees.

What Italy is seeing, ultimately, is that hatred for marginalized groups has been normalized. One source for this over recent decades is the media mogul and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose TV channel has a regular show demonizing migrants as criminals.

Jacobin’s in-depth reportage explains how Italian fascism never really went away – it only went underground, and is now resurfacing. Two key factors in this historic arc are: 1) fascist parties have often been invited to share power, and 2) fascist violence has never been effectively dealt with.

The far-right has also gained popularity by cloaking its xenophobic ideology and admiration for Mussolini in what are normally considered “left-wing” political actions, such as running social centers, fighting gentrification and using anti-establishment rhetoric.

During a recent visit to a Bologna high school, Clancy reflected on why so many young people are drawn to join fascist groups. “It was being a part of a group that fascinated them. Little did they actually know of the fascist ideologies those groups were promoting. Again, it’s easy to fall into hate ideologies of these bottom feeders when you feel you are left alone by society and its politicians,” she added.

Instead, Coalizione Civica promotes a program called “educazione alle differenze” (educational differences), which features activities that engender respect for different identities and cultural backgrounds, including LGBT.

Clancy explained that a working group from the Coalition is also trying to counter the racist Italian mainstream media narrative. “They’ve been interviewing citizens and compiling data regarding their ideas of fear and dangerous experiences in their own neighbourhood... It helps to

debunk the mainstream media narrative of an increase in micro-criminality particularly at the hand of migrants, which is not supported by any data or statistics,” she said.

## **Stopping Neoliberalism’s Morph Into Fascism**

Italy, like Spain, Greece and Portugal, has suffered from severe austerity policies enforced by the EU and other neoliberal institutions, which resulted in increased poverty, cuts to welfare, widening inequality and growing gentrification. Clancy said Bologna needs to change drastically in order to deal with its staggering inequality.

“Poverty can’t be criminalized or marginalized, as the present administration is doing. It needs to be at the foreground of the city’s planning,” she said.

Along with redistributing wealth and investing more in social services, it’s crucial to tackle the crisis afflicting many existing social structures, including old political identities, Clancy added. “In this context, youth or disenfranchised people from difficult backgrounds crave that strong sense of identity that neo-fascist formations thrive on.”

As a rebel city that is resisting the crisis and reimagining solutions through a lens of Radical Muncipalism, Bologna faces an opportunity once more to lead the country. “We hope to build a sense of community that people are really lacking,” Clancy said. “Through participatory politics, we aspire to bring those people into the decision making process and give them a way to express their point of view [in order] to be a part of finding the right solution to their problems. It’s really about being for the 99%.”

# **Rebel Cities 6: How Jackson, Mississippi Is Making The Economy Work For The People (Jackson, Mississippi)**

Jackson, Mississippi, will be “the most radical city on the planet,” Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the city’s mayor, pledged at the People’s Summit in Chicago, where he spoke last July after his landslide election win.

The promise is grounded in a plan. Through participatory democracy and building counter-power, Jackson is organizing, and co-designing, an escape from capitalism and structural racism. The plan is comprehensive, and transforming the economy with cooperatives is one pillar.

## **Rising Jackson Through Cooperatives and a Solidarity Economy**

“We want [cooperatives] to become the dominant feature of our local economy,” Kali Akuno told *The Nation*. “It’s really about a localization of the economy, about maximum control in the community’s hands. These are the things we can do that protect us from the ravages of global capitalism.”

Akuno and Mayor Lumumba are co-founders of Cooperation Jackson, which launched in May 2014. For the solidarity economy they seek to build, cooperatives serve as a cornerstone.

Jackson, and the state of Mississippi, need change. It remains the poorest part of the U.S., with a predominantly African-American population that first survived slavery, then apartheid Jim Crow laws. The structural racism continues today, as Akuno shorthands the region’s problems as the three P’s: Prisons, Poverty and Paternalistic white supremacy.

Mississippi is also an epicentre of Afro-American resistance, ever since the 1729 indigenous-slave Natchez Rebellion. From as far back as the 1800s, black farmers have formed cooperatives and other forms of social/economic solidarity in the region.

Flash forward to 2005, an important date in reaffirming Jackson’s cooperative culture, when the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and Jackson People’s Assembly co-created the Jackson-Kush plan in 18 predominantly African-American counties across the state.

Neglect of black communities after Hurricane Katrina catalysed the plan. In economic terms, it was an effort to reverse the status quo so that the economy worked for all people. Today, Jackson has a community center and cooperatives incubator called the Chokwe Lumumba Center for Economic Democracy and Development, named after the current mayor’s father, whose premature death in 2013 ended his legacy-making work as Jackson’s mayor. The Jackson plan also facilitates education programs and a federation of cooperatives, and aims to foster cooperative banks.

Among the Jackson movement’s strategies have been to buy up vacant lots to create a community land trust and prevent property speculators from out-pricing locals. Some land is used

to build a growing eco-village that provides affordable and sustainable housing. Solar and green energy cooperatives are also being developed.

Jackson pledged to be “the most sustainable city in the south” when Lumumba Sr. was mayor. This work continues today.

The Malcolm-X Grassroots Movement’s slogan, “Free the Land,” cuts to the heart of this new kind of inclusive sustainable economics. Urban Freedom Farms are growing to provide sustainable jobs and affordable fruit and vegetables to working people. Post-crash Detroit has gone even further in the square area it has farmed.

The Jackson-Kush plan advocates the community empowering itself in tandem with political representatives, transforming the system both inside and out. Mayor Lumumba Jr. has reinstated his father’s 1% tax to rebuild the city’s neglected infrastructure and has retained city control over education at Mississippi State. Educational investments are set to increase.

Lumumba is also using his mayoral platform to further promote the Jackson-Kush plan and to resist white supremacy. For instance, he boycotted and denounced Trump’s visit to the city’s Civil Rights Museum.

The Jackson plan looks toward future decades while building on centuries of resistance. Its advocates stress that “they are going slowly as they are going far,” echoing the Zapatistas of Chiapas who are themselves building a cooperative economy, as are people in the Basque Country of Spain with the Mondragon network.

Taking inspiration from closer to home, Jackson also looks to Cleveland, Ohio, which is driving an innovative economic model it hopes to serve the people, called Community Wealth Building. A core idea in Cleveland is to create “anchor institutions,” places like hospitals, schools and universities that buy locally. Cooperatives are now rebuilding the city’s economy.

Across the ocean, Preston, Lancashire in the UK has replicated a similar project and, in doing so, keeps an an extra £1.2 billion in its local economy.

Both projects, in Ohio and Lancashire, are intended to turn around economically depressed areas hit hard by the 2008 financial crash. At the city level, Jackson has taken on these ideas, pushed especially by Ward 6 Councilman Aaron Banks.

## **You Can’t Mount a Defense Without an Offense, or Visa Versa**

The way that political and economic crises is propelling counter-municipal movements to form cooperatives and other economic alternatives is a trend weaving through global radical municipalism. Just as Jackson has developed ideas reflecting its rich history of resistance, it provides ample learning points for other cities to follow.

A key strategy it employs is this: as a city it cannot simply rely on the political sphere, nor work completely outside of it. Said in another way, you cannot resist systemic oppression without building an alternative. As Kali Akuno explained it: “One strategy without the other is like mounting a defense without an offense or vice versa. Both are critical to advancing authentic transformative change.”

The Jackson plan focuses on participatory democracy as much as rethinking economics. The People’s Assembly holds mass engagements four times a year, providing a chance for the community to guide their elected representative, while also implementing participatory budgeting plans.

The Jackson plan is looking for citizens to co-design an inclusive future. One issue – that only the richest will have access to the latest digital technologies, such as 3D printers, known as a “fabrication divide” – is being dealt with through crowd-funding for a Community Production Center and Community Production Cooperative. Forging an inclusive tech future has a parallel with the Rights to the City model by which residents are actively reshaping their cities.

The Jackson plan – like the economic makeover in many rebel cities – has an internationalist perspective, aiming to grow within across U.S.-wide and international solidarity economy networks. The familiar lesson here again is: You can’t only smash the current system, but must co-design another world that circumvents, and can ultimately replace, the current one.

## **Rebel Cities 7: Water Wars For The Human Right To Water In Athens And Beyond (Athens, Greece)**

Neoliberal institutions, including the Greek state and the European Union, are busy trying to sell off Greece's municipal water services. "We are being colonized by outside forces. We are no longer in charge of our own economic affairs," an anonymous Greek water activist told Andreas Bieler, a political economy professor from University of Nottingham, U.K.

"Water wars" are becoming a more regular result as corporations aim to privatize public services, including the most precious one, water. In Europe, 62 million people lack basic sanitation and 14 million don't have clean drinking water. Globally, 663 million lack access to safe water.

History shows that water privatization often leads to disastrous result for the public. For instance, in Bucharest, water privatizations caused a twelvefold price rise. In Greece – which has faced austerity-on-steroids since 2010, as EU-imposed cuts to public spending have driven the country into a humanitarian crisis – privatization and asset stripping have driven the story.

But momentum is shifting globally. 835 public services, including 267 water services, have returned to public hands this century, as documented by the Transnational Institute. These are all examples of remunicipalization, in which cities and locales are taking back their services rather than allowing them to remain centralized, national public bodies.

The same is even true in Greece, where counter-power and municipalization are holding back neoliberalism's march.

### **Why Greece is Trying to Sell Itself to the Lowest Bidder**

Since 2010, Greece has been on the sharp end of an austerity and privatization regime imposed by the European Union and IMF as a condition of its bailout loans. All this despite the fact that the country's debt is illegitimate.

Debt crises are not a new way to subject countries to neoliberal discipline. Similar structural adjustment policies have been inflicted on the global South since the 80s. Other European countries are self-inflicting this policy, even when it's not imposed on them from outside. The E.U. specifically encourages a water privatization agenda by supporting a bureaucratic architecture where water is regulated as a commodity in markets.

"While privatizations have been a pillar of Greece's bailouts since 2010, they have raised proceeds of just 5 billion euros, rather than a targeted 50 billion euros, mainly due to the crisis, political and union resistance and bureaucracy," Reuters reported.



## **Keeping Athens's And Thessaloniki's Water Public**

The water movement and municipalism greatly compliment Greece's union resistance. Greece's water war focuses on EYDAP [Athens] and EYATH [Thessaloniki] water companies, which were proposed for partial sale in 2010 and full sale in 2012.

The Syriza government under Alexis Tsipras went even further. It tried to prevent EYDAP from taking on new employers – a classic tactic, and act of sabotage, to enable privatization for a failing public body. Yet, as the third memorandum ends in August 2018, only 11 percent of EYDAP and roughly a quarter of EYATH will ultimately be privatized.

Many social movements stalled these sell-offs. When Thessaloniki's EYATH was put out for tender, a citizens union initiative stepped forward among the usual corporate bidders. Initiative-136 offered that every water user would own their own water company. The bid failed, but it challenged the fundamentalist neoliberal narrative, instead promoting social justice and the right to water.

In 2014, Thessaloniki also held a municipal referendum in which 98 percent voted to keep the water public, once again breaking the dominant argument for privatization. Both Initiative-136 and the referendum grew out of a broad network, including new unions combining citizens and workers, the locally impacted municipalities and organizations like Not the Water and Water Warriors. The next step for Initiative-136 is to form a cooperative aimed at buying the 24 percent privatized share and making the water utility into a cooperative.

## **Cities Grew on Public Water, and Can Again**

Thessaloniki declared water as a human right in June 2018, joining the Blue Cities municipal network that includes European capitals from Paris to Berlin to Bern, Switzerland. The Greek water movements also took the issue of human water rights to the Supreme Court, which paused and lessened the privatization momentum.

Across the E.U., the networks working on municipalization and unions have successfully gathered 1.9 million signatures to recognize water as a human right. The initiative has not blocked the E.U. from supporting water privatization, but the pressure is down.

Considering water as a human right undermines neoliberal ideology. It also fits the goals of Radical Municipalism, when we look both words' Latin origins: Radix means roots, and Municeps refers to free town. Even if we go back to the roots of cities – to Ancient Athens or further back – these cities were literally built above springs. No city was ever built on a privatized water provision.

This is not academic. Municipalization offers a third way for cities. It agrees that nationalization is often inefficient, corrupt and bureaucratic. Yet it also provides a way for people to control their own services, avoiding privatization, which largely compounds and expands the problems of state-run services.

Municipalizing public services reflects 19<sup>th</sup> century practice, when modern cities co-developed the water infrastructure that multinationals are today trying to exploit for profit. The cities that have reclaimed their water under public control include Paris and Berlin. If a city the size of Paris can do it, it's hard to argue big business is necessary anywhere in this sector. But it doesn't stop corporations from trying.

Veolia and Suez are the two giant French companies that lost their contracts in Paris. Beyond France, these firms are busy trying to privatize water around the globe, for instance in India, another front in the global water war.

The movement to reclaim public control of water is also flowing strong in Catalonia, Spain, where the city of Terrassa recently succeeded and many nearby cities are close to reclamation. Again a convergence of activists, unions, radical city councils, councils working together and the broader European alliance is enabling this change. But Terrassa shows how dirty water companies will fight. The mayor, who administered the popular decision to remunicipalize the city's water, stepped down due to a campaign of fear, defamation and intimidation he says was orchestrated by the water company.

Turning back to Greece, the final word on water privatization may change, as it has done through interventions from both sides. But as Prof. Bieler reported, even if companies increase their holding of water rights, unionized water workers and citizens who regard water as an essential commons will fight on. Rebel cities are not just built on many powerful ideas: They are built on the power of many people. As one Athenian worker said, imagining a future of privatized and expensive water: "In a starving society, it is our obligation not to cut such essential services as water."

# **Rebel Cities 8: New York & Warsaw New Focal Points For A Growing Global Movement**

## **(New York City, New York & Warsaw, Poland)**

“There’s a critical mass of municipalist thought and sympathy in several areas in the U.S.,” explained Eleanor Finley, an anthropologist and activist. “You can think of there being four corners of a small but rapidly growing municipalist movement: the Pacific Northwest (Portland, Olympia, Seattle); the Northeast (New York City, Massachusetts); the South (Jackson, Miss., Atlanta, South Carolina); and the Midwest (Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit).”

She continued: “With the exception of Cooperation Jackson, the municipalist and civic platform projects at each of these locations are in early stages of development.”

Finley works with Symbiosis, a network of “activists, organisers and dreamers” who, alongside Cooperation Jackson and other U.S. municipalists, are co-organising the Fearless Cities gathering in New York on July 27.

Barcelona hosted the first Fearless Cities convergence last year after a wave of participative citizen platforms reclaimed cities across the Spanish state in 2015. Fearless Cities One brought together municipalists from every continent to skill-share on themes including feminizing politics, refugee rights and anti-corruption.

The global municipalist movement is growing to solve endemic problems, as this series is showcasing. Cities are filling the gaps left by nation-states, which often themselves exasperate the crises. In 2018, there will be Fearless Cities in Warsaw and New York, with parallel events planned in Chile and Belgium.

### **New York, July 27–29**

New York is ideal for the United States’ first Fearless Cities, according to Finley. “Firstly, it’s important to remember the singular place New York City holds in the U.S. left, both historically and in the present. At a very pragmatic level, NYC is likely the only city with a left with the capacity for such a project. Also, assembly democracy and direct civic participation is palatable there because Occupy Wall Street still holds a strong place in people’s imaginations.”

Convergence themes include transforming power, participatory democracy, queering and feminizing politics and contemporary municipal issues. It will feature the solidarity economy in Jackson, explored in Part 6 of this series. And its theme of feminising politics is something you can also see from Brazil (Part 1) to Rojava (Part 2) to the Zapatistas (Part 3).

If radical municipalism is about locally created solutions to global problems, Fearless Cities demonstrates how municipalism is more of a philosophical way of doing politics, rather than a blueprint to be applied.

## **Fearless Cities, Warsaw, July 13–15**

The organisers of the convergence in Poland's capital, Warsaw, explained about the central and eastern European context: "Our cities are much different because of the transformation from central planning to the free market society. We have special challenges, different aspirations yet similar solutions."

The workshops and teach-outs in Warsaw include: "The common denominator of Central and Eastern Europe"; "How sports can challenge hate"; and a walking tour showcasing how the municipalist activist group Miasto Jest Nasze is dealing with Warsaw's acute housing problem. Miasto Jest Nasze, which serves as the convergence organisers, is also taking on the city's acute smog problem. This conference will also look east, to municipal projects in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Georgia.

The way that rebel cities are networking answers a critique of radical municipalism, namely: how can cities solve global problems? In practical terms, refugee solidarity shows their collective power.

## **Challenging States: Making Refugees Welcome**

The rise of far-right anti-immigrant politics has taken hold across Europe as well as the U.S. in the last five years. It is resisted, however, with the message "Refugees Welcome". The radical municipalist mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, brought this movement to wider public attention through a viral video.

Afterwards, rebel cities across Europe galvanised to become sanctuary cities, offering accommodation for refugees. City halls hung massive refugees welcome banners. Today, this continues as Barcelona offers safe harbour to migrants who survived crossing the Mediterranean.

"Seeing the failure of the Spanish state, we wanted to open our cities [as] people's houses. Town hall's message was clear: The Spanish state is not providing enough support," said David Castro, who participates in the international working group of Barcelona En Comu, the citizens platform that runs the city.

## **It's About Taking Back Your City**

Castro said that before, there was little mainstream discourse challenging the state-led policies that demonised and detained migrants, sometimes causing their deaths. European states (and the U.S. included) have continued with these kinds of policies against migrants. The crucial question is how much worse would it be for migrants if not for the political resistance and courage shown by some.

The international working group of Barcelona En Comu organised the first Fearless Cities. It offers help and support to municipalist projects across the globe, including at both the convergences in Warsaw and New York. In fact, there are many municipalists networking internation-

ally. This enabled the 2015 municipalist wave across the Spanish state, building on a network that had created and grown out of the 2011 protests of the square.

“It was not a formal partnership, instead a lot of information sharing, as everyone had different ecosystems, with their own unique problems,” added Castro. “For instance, in Zaragoza they have a big problem with corruption. Three or four families own the city, so their campaign was more anti-corruption [than Barcelona].”

Looking at the growing, global municipalist movement, it’s useful to think of it as a network movement: Every city is looking to build autonomy locally, but they are thinking globally.

This has historic precedents in the Ancient Greek city-states and confederations of Indigenous northeast American nations before colonisation. The most developed autonomous city networks today are in the Democratic Confederation of Northern Syria and the Zapatistas’ Chiapas. In the U.S., Jackson shows a city moving towards an economic model that aims to not be a centralised source of power (ie. capitalism) but as a hub to enable other decentralised cooperative forces.

Looking back to New York, Finley said that Fearless Cities in the US connects especially to an American politics in flux. “The polarization of society is now growing into two completely separate trajectories of development,” she said.

“On the one hand, there’s a branch devolving rapidly into fascism, which is concentrated primarily within decaying suburban zones and neglected rural areas. Then there’s a [radically democratic] branch that is becoming very radical, very quickly.”

# **Rebel Cities 9: Iceland'S Slow-Burning Digital Democratic Revolution (Reykjavík, Iceland)**

For the last decade, Iceland has been a subject of democracy folklore. The country is often neglected due to its size and location, but when it receives attention it is almost mythologized. One reason for this is that the people there, from the bottom up, are innovating with digital democratic experiments. The folk are co-creating the law.

Icelanders to their credit have twice peacefully ousted governments; they are world leaders in transparency laws and digital freedom; and through referendum the nation decided not to bail out its failed banks. Through a crowd-sourced Constitution, Iceland showed a pathway for 21<sup>st</sup> Century democratic renewal, although successive politicians blocked the final destination.

In addition, the Pirate Party of Iceland, a new direct democracy party, has often polled highest yet has not made it into government. Not least, the island of roughly a third of a million inhabitants continues blazing a trail for radical municipalism, even if its actions in the North Atlantic can feel strangely detached from the rest of the global movement.

## **The Punchline is Digital Democracy**

In 2010, comedian Jón Gnarr ran as mayor of Reykjavík advocating for “honesty and integrity, empathy, non-violent communication and ... fun. We were going to try to have fun doing it.”

He ran initially as a joke – the self-declared “anarcho-surrealist” candidate – but he encouraged citizens to participate through a website, Better Reykjavík. Launched just before the elections, the site enabled citizens to input and up-vote proposals and initiatives for the council.

To everyone's surprise, not least himself, Jón won. [Icelanders use first names]. By last year, using the online platform, 70,000 of 120,000 Reykjavíkians had interacted – proposing, supporting or collaborating on proposals. As a result, over 750 crowd-sourced proposals were implemented, ranging from converting an ex-power station to a youth centre to increasing cycle lanes and gender-neutral toilets.

## **Eight Years On**

“[The platform] is still embraced by the council. The user interface has been overhauled so it looks more modern and is more usable than ever,” said Halldór Auður Svansson, a Pirate Party councillor since 2014 who chairs the city's Committee on Administration and Democracy.

“Better Reykjavík has been floundering a bit, participation has dwindled and it hasn't really been developed any further,” he added. “[The online platform] My Neighbourhood, though, has been flourishing better and there have been some improvements in the processes.”

Whereas Better Reykjavík is about making proposals for the whole city, My Neighbourhood brings it down to an even more local level. Six percent of the city's budget is spent on crowd-sourced proposals – which today mean Reykjavík is reclaiming its principle street from cars and offering a new walkway to the beach.

Crowd-sourcing city development embodies the Right to the City aspect, where residents shape their city. The fine-tuning with My Neighbourhood includes an extra liaison between the council and the citizen with a proposal.

Halldór said: "It has lead to some very visible results in that it allows people to shape their local physical environment. Participation has also been good, over 10 percent last year so it has made an impact in terms of getting people to take part."

## **A Slow-Burning Revolution**

Iceland's national political upheavals mimic its volcanoes. But things shift at bottom level, too. Compared to the days when Iceland nearly implemented a crowd-sourced Constitution, Halldór says there is less going on at the national level with digital democracy:

"But I do think that [the municipal democracy] has helped to keep the flame going. A few more municipalities have adopted the platform that Better Reykjavík runs for themselves, so more people think participatory tools are important... even standard practice at the local level," he said.

As an example, the Pirate Party went from outside rebels in 2013 to a firm place in Icelandic national politics, and are challenging now for a place in government. On the local level they now have two seats in Reykjavík and one in the town of Kópavogur.

"Our platform was very much based on transparency and eDemocracy although we did have some really fleshed out policy proposals, such as in welfare," Halldór added.

Just as the Pirates in Parliament push Iceland's world class journalist freedom laws, they are also bringing transparency to the city. Their pressure is opening up the cities' budget to public inspection, which is a safeguard against corruption and nepotism. What makes this world-leading is the fact that citizens can see the information as raw data, un-manipulated by any sources. This means the council cannot even dress up the figures, and it makes analysis easier.

In another spending innovation backed by the Pirates, Reykjavík city has teamed up with a crowd-funding platform, Karolina Fund, to joint fund public-public initiatives such as land projects and housing. With Public-Private Partnerships at a crisis point the world over, this is an alternative that has parallels with municipalization of public services.

## **Connected, Yet Somehow Isolated**

Iceland has a paradoxical relationship with the rest of the world. Despite providing world-leading internet access, its social movements can seem isolated. It was the first victim to the financial crisis. Off the back of this, its social movements came earlier than most of the Global North. In turn, Iceland was far earlier within the same post-2008 reaction that catalyzed the radical municipalist movements across the North. But often even within radical municipalism, Iceland remains peripheral.

I put this interpretation to Halldór, who said: “I agree, Iceland is somewhat disconnected. We like to think that we’re always inventing the wheel, that we’re so special and have things figured out for ourselves, and we tend to overlook what others are doing. The geographical distance might have something to do with it.”

He added, “We’re also a curious mixture of progressive rebels and placid conservatives. A part of the population wants to keep moving forward but a large section is also pretty content with the way things are and don’t want to rock the boat too much.”

Another simple point that Iceland demonstrates concerning radical municipalism is that democracy is, in fact, about devolving power to the lowest possible denominator. You can see this from Better Reykjavík focusing down into My Neighbourhood, and more broadly in the way Iceland weathered its seismic hit from the financial crash.

Considering the last decade, Halldór concluded, “It’s true that the hype [about Iceland] is sometimes overblown, but the advantage is certainly there. Access to politicians is relatively easy, and it’s usually not difficult to organize protests and mobilize people when the need arises.”



# **Rebel Cities 10: Rosario, Argentina, Abandons The Establishment (Rosario, Argentina)**

“Not only do we denounce this model of the city... [where] we are left out, but we also take care of building the other model that can replace it. Now we want to do it among more. Among all. For all. This is an invitation to those who believe in going after dreams. We start, and we will wait for you. There is room for everyone here.”

So reads the opening statement of the Ciudad Futura (Future City) Party of Rosario, Argentina, which launched in 2013.

The political party formed by calling for people to join to “build the utopia”. In Argentina’s third largest city, Future City now has three councillors and will challenge for the 2019 municipal elections. It continues to turn the vision of an inclusive and just city into a reality, working both inside and outside the city’s institutional space.

Globally, radical municipalism offers a way of doing politics differently, reclaiming political control beyond the political class that created the multiple global crises facing capitalist civilization. But the dilemma facing Future City is an old one: how to stick to its radical roots. South America had a wave of leftist socialist governments in the last decade, although this trend has waned.

If it succeeds and grows, how does Future City avoid becoming part of the new political establishment and selling out its ideals?

## **Homes Fit For Human Habitation**

Future City was born from two grassroots organisations fighting for people in the *villa miseria*, Argentina’s favelas. The three councillors in Rosario’s City Hall continue this fight.

In Cotar, a district in Northern Rosario, Future City is backing residents’ concerns that their social housing block is dangerous and at imminent risk of collapse. In March, a teenage resident was electrocuted in the building’s common space.

The campaign aims to force City Hall to build the residents a new block. At the time of writing, it has won an urgent review of the building’s structural integrity, and judicial proceedings against the residents – who refused to pay their rent in protest – will cease.

City councillors denouncing buildings unfit for human habitation is what you might expect. But around the world, this doesn’t always happen. And not only in the Global South. Just look at the Grenfell Tower fire last year in West London.

## **Back to Future City's Beginnings**

Two social movements begin the story of Future City in its aim to build a utopia: Giros, which began fighting against property speculators pricing out and socially cleansing locals in the northern districts of Rosario, and M26, which began resisting the violence of the drug wars.

In 2005, these movements fused into Future City, expanding their remit into a bottom-up initiative to reclaim land, push for food sovereignty and provide education based on democratic principles. Today, the party has a cooperative cultural factory called Distrito Sie7e, where they gather on weekends and hold assemblies and workshops.

Working in this effort is also Tambo La Resistencia, a regional cooperative dairy farm that provides jobs and affordable milk to a district blighted by poverty and drug trafficking. And alongside it is another food cooperative that sells more than 400 products, providing locals with a healthy alternative to capitalist inflation.

Future City also runs a school, and now a university: the University of Doing. The school fills a gap missed by state provision. The university aims to fill an intellectual gap, preparing students not for managing a corporation or state job, but managing the commons. For instance, this includes showcasing how to transform a failed private enterprise and turn it into a social enterprise, something that is occurring more and more often in Argentina, South America and elsewhere – including Greece – due to the ongoing crises precipitated by capitalism.

Actively reclaiming the private as a commons relates directly to Future City's ethos, as reflected in the party's opening statement of action: "Politicians don't just say what needs to be done, but do it."

## **One Foot In City Hall, One On The Streets**

Future City's decision to run for City Hall was made in a general assembly. To increase its membership and get it over the required threshold to run in the elections, the party presented a citizens solution: selling low-price milk.

Now, Future City is pushing an agenda to stop social exclusion and increase gender inclusion; for the regional elections it selected an all-women shortlist. This was deemed illegal under Argentina law, which asserts a minimum of 30 percent women, and therefore also 30 percent men in office. Importantly, this provoked a national debate about the continued male dominance of politics.

Another notable campaign was the councillors' support for mothers whose children benefit from medical marijuana, legalised in Argentina since 2017, for conditions including Aspergers. In many cases, the mothers could not afford it, so the party is supporting their claim to home-grow without reprisals from the city, and more broadly to make the medical decriminalisation inclusive.

## **In Cities, A Decentralised Pink Tide Is Quietly Rising**

Women-led politics; social inclusion; resisting rampant capitalism: These are all hallmarks of the Pink Tide, a name given to the post-Cold War period across South America when social

democratic parties came to power, from Argentina and Brazil to Ecuador and Bolivia, replacing dictators supported by the financial titans of the Global North.

Now, with hard-line neoliberal parties at the fore nationally – with the exception of Uruguay – commentators are declaring the Pink Tide over. Professor Omar Encarnación gave a detailed overview in *The Nation*, pointing out how the movement raised living standards for millions and left a legacy of social programs. He also asked what its lasting legacy will be on the evolving political discourse.

Radical municipalism is a way for that tide to continue. During the post-War period, social movements in some ways benefited from the inclusive values of centralised socialist governments. One example was increased university inclusion; in Brazil this enabled the “favela intellectuals” that are co-leading the participative intersectional-feminist spring.

Equally, the failures of the Pink Tide – the corruption of a centralised political class, its shortcomings to deal with capitalism’s crises and the impact of the return of hardline conservative politics – means people are turning to a fourth way: Municipalism. Rosario is not unique in South America as more people seek to reclaim land, fight for the excluded, build cooperatives and push for a broader participative politics. As this series continues, we will highlight other examples on the continent where party-movements are not only setting out what should happen, but actively building this future.

# **Rebel Cities 11: As Newham Transforms London, Democratic Socialists Awaken (Newham, UK)**

In May 2018 local elections, the U.K.'s longest-standing directly elected mayor was ousted. It happened in Newham, East London, where Rokhsana Fiaz took power with a radical manifesto to alleviate the council's housing crisis and increase citizen participation.

The election of Fiaz, the first woman of color to become a mayor in Europe, has parallels with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's recent victory in New York City.

For one, Fiaz is in the opposite corner of the Labour Party from the neoliberal Robin Wales, whom she replaced, and is already challenging big finance. Both Ocasio-Cortez and Fiaz are part of a new generation surging in the Labour and Democratic parties on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a result, not only is the face of each of their parties changing, but a debate about whether their parties should, and can, put people above profits is intensifying.

For instance, Newham's decision to take on Barclays bank shows the council is addressing what has become a full-blown crisis in U.K. local government. Fiaz may not call herself a radical municipalist, but her actions demonstrate a new way of doing politics.

Notably, Newham's sea change opens up questions about how parties of the left can escape their generation-long love affair with neoliberalism, and the role local politics can play in this transformation.

## **How One London Borough is Challenging Big Finance**

Fiaz announced in July that Newham is suing Barclays, a bank that sold them LOBO (Lender Option, Borrower Option) loans. The problems with LOBO loans are well-documented. In a 2015 Parliamentary inquiry, a former Barclays trader said he "would not do these deals if you put a gun to my head."

LOBOs are complex financial instruments that can carry interest rates of up to 10%, and can last up to 70 years, as Occupy.com previously reported. Debt Resistance UK found that 240 councils across Britain are losing millions to banks in excess interest payments on LOBOs despite the fact that those councils could equally borrow from the central government.

This research has been developed into the form of a Citizen Debt Audit in Newham by Research for Action, a workers co-operative. In a recent report that I contributed to, entitled "Cuts and Contempt: Experiences of Austerity and Council Democracy in Newham," the authors detail residents' experience of lack of services while interest payments grow.

Newham is one of 15 councils nationwide that are now taking class action against Barclays on LOBOs. Previously, Newham Councillor Fiaz had called on the council to listen to resident

concerns regarding LOBOs. The response was to attack the messenger, not deal with the message. Now, that's starting to change.

The case highlights how little Robin Wales's administration listened to residents in one of Britain's most diverse and deprived boroughs – and how this negligence ultimately led to a movement within the party that challenged his leadership. Wales also faced resistance from social movements, including the housing rights movement like Focus-E15, whose single mothers took to the streets nationwide to press their case.

## **Rethinking Local Politics in Newham**

Mayor Fiaz has sought to rectify another dubious financial decision, initiating a public investigation that found the Newham council had wasted £40 million on a loan for Newham's former Olympic stadium.

At the first council meeting since becoming mayor, Newham council held a Peoples Assembly with the aim to establish "openness, resident engagement, transparency and accountability." These are antonyms for the previous administration.

In concrete terms, Newham now plans to deal with homelessness, including establishing a new 20-bed homeless refuge and offering more support for those sleeping rough.

The council will also build 1,000 new homes for social housing. The mayor will even put her position to a referendum as to whether to abolish the concentrated power of her position.

## **Municipalism And Reclaiming U.K. Labour And U.S. Democrats**

The new era of activist government in Newham is far from isolated. After a grassroots campaign to prevent bulldozing a nearby community, another Labour-dominated London borough, Haringey, has deselected its mayor.

Elsewhere, similar changes are happening in local Labour councils, from Brighton on the south-east coast to Liverpool in England's opposite corner.

A similar wave of leftist U.S. Democrats is one the rise, spurred particularly to fight Donald Trump's policies. Examples include Dylan Parker, who was elected to the city council in Rock Island, Illinois, and #BlackLivesMatter activist khalid kamau in South Fulton, Georgia.

In Pennsylvania, Elizabeth Fiedler, Sara Innamorato and Summer Lee are among those standing for state positions in November. Julia Salaza is running in the primaries for New York's state legislature.

Nationally, both the Democratic and Labour parties personnel are changing in a similar direction. For instance, Cori Bush of Missouri and Brent Welder of Kansas were hoping to join Ocasio-Cortez in the U.S. Congress. In the UK, where the Labour Party is led by leftist Jeremy Corbyn, there is a movement to deselect neoliberal MPs – including strong calls to replace four parliamentarians who consistently prop up the Conservatives' shaky grip on power.

In mainstream discourse, British Labour's leftist leadership is attacked for being unelectable, even though it tops opinion polls. In the U.S., the neoliberal establishment, which still hold sway, pushes a similar argument. Places like Missouri and Kansas could falsify this assertion in November.

Reading between the lines there is an equally important question: In power, could Corbyn's Labour or a Democratic Socialist of America party transform the political direction? Could they, for example, challenge the big banks?

## **Democratic Socialists Should *Be* Municipalists, Not Use Them**

Returning to Newham, the new administration is doing just that. It is backed by a substantive argument that the banks are taking money that could go into public services. But its foundations lay in the social movements and people power, which challenged the old regime and enabled the new mayor to replace the former. Fiaz is not just a representative: There is a movement to continue as allies support her, and they can also hold her feet to the fire if she fails to follow through.

If we look to Greece's Syriza party and Obama's first run at the U.S. presidency, both pledged to take on the power of big finance. Yet Syriza quickly capitulated to the austerity agenda, and Obama never effectively restrained Wall Street. Both Syriza and Obama began with mass engagement, but once in office their participative engagement withered. It is the municipalists now in Greece who are challenging the austerity agenda being pushed by Syriza.

Radical municipalism is people power. It is about rallying people to engage in politics, all the time, not solely to win elections. Radical municipalism as a political way of thinking offers a means to occupy and transform political parties, but only if it is genuinely applied – not merely as lip-service to win elections.

# **Rebel Cities 12: Valparaíso Shows How Radical Municipalism Must Deal With Our Burning World (Valparaíso, Chile)**

Wildfires worldwide show our climate emergency, one symptom of the northern hemisphere's unprecedented heatwave. From the European Arctic to Greece, from California to Siberia, the flames of climate change are killing people and destroying ecosystems in their wake. Cities must adapt to protect their populations and act to slow down and reverse the disaster.

Looking south, Valparaíso, Chile's second largest city, is another place that's on the frontline. Here, fires' frequency have increased with over 350 serious fires blazing in the city since 2000.

In October 2016, Valparaíso elected a radical municipalist administration. The city is aware that it is existentially threatened by the ever-burning conditions around it, and aims to deal with the situation. Fighting climate change requires practical measures, but leaders here recognize it is also about imagining another city.

## **'Valparaíso is a City That Burns'**

"Valparaíso is a city that burns, literally," explained Jorge Sharp, the mayor of Valparaíso, speaking at Fearless Cities, Barcelona, the first radical municipalist convergence in 2017. "We had a fire in 2014 that burned 15 percent of the city and left 10,000 people homeless. There was another big fire in 2017. And the central problem is housing."

Sharp went on to explain that more than 10,000 people are living in temporary tents due to the fires. The fire in 2017 ripped through the city's port. Fires frequently hit the *campamento* (favelas) on the hills surrounding Valparaíso. Overcrowded housing, massive landfill dumps and poor sanitation have intensified these disasters. Without water it is hard to fight fires.

Sharp is from the Movimiento Valparaíso Ciudadano, or Valparaíso Citizens Movement. The coalition comprises feminists, ecologists, labour unions and local cooperatives on a platform of participation and social inclusion.

The Movement has made significant improvements to tackle wildfires since late 2016. For instance, it is clearing the extensive rubbish dumps, such as Washington landfill and La Porteña passage, each located on the city's hills. The administration also now regulates high-rise buildings. These and similar measures are driven by local community assemblies and neighbourhood petitions.

Meanwhile, city measures to mitigate climate change – which are also in line with the citizen movement's ethos of social inclusion – include reduced trolleybus fare prices, since mass transit

is one key solution to climate change. But as Sharp explained at Fearless Cities 2017, Chile suffers from a heavily centralised state where cities have few resources.

Though this shouldn't be surprising: The country was neoliberalism's test case, pushed by General Augusto Pinochet, who was in power between 1973 and 1990 with the support of both Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

## **Tackling Neoliberalism and Climate Change**

Though General Pinochet's dictatorship ended nearly three decades ago, the same elite families, and free market policies, hold sway. Researcher Nessim Achouche explained how the leftist coalition, which has at times been in power in the country, has followed the neoliberal consensus economically, while diverging on social issues such as its support for abortion. Chile's current billionaire president, Sebastián Piñera, represents the hard neoliberals and is seen as heir to Pinochet.

Neoliberalism in the broadest sense has worked to accelerate climate change, reducing regulations on carbon-intensive business and promoting a mindset of the world as an endless supply of commodities to be used up, as Naomi Klein among others has pointed out.

President Piñera is now introducing renewable energy, but many consider his actions a form of greenwash capitalism. He is also reducing regulations to expand Chile's sizable mining industry and working to destroy the Mapuche indigenous lands and waterways to allow a hydro-electric dam on the San Pedro River.

Against this neoliberalist context, the Movimiento Valparaíso Ciudadano election in late 2016 represented a political earthquake. The movement hit the streets in 2011 with Chile's mass student movement. Jorge Sharp was a leading figure. Like in Brazil and Argentina, radical municipalism in Chile has fueled the bottom-up Pink Tide that is swelling across South America.

Social ecology connects to the eco-defenders and indigenous peoples resisting extraction of the rural eco-systems. In urban, radical municipalism, it also offers a pathway to stop business as usual and tackle climate change.

## **Social Ecology Vs Climate Disaster**

"Only when we end the hierarchical relations between human beings (men over women, young over old, one ethnicity or religion over another) will we be able to heal our relationships with the natural world," Debbie Bookchin writes in the foreword to *Make Rojava Green Again*.

It is a concise, punchy, must-read book about social ecology as a key pillar of the social revolution in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria [DFNS] (formerly Rojava). In the global movement away from a capitalist economy, DFNS has travelled far; the revolution was inspired by Debbie's father, Murray Bookchin. The Kurdish-led movements have taken his ideas, among other thinkers, to forge a society where people power rules through autonomous councils.

In practical terms this means worker cooperatives becoming the backbone of the economy, with direct democratic oversight from the autonomous councils. Rather than for-profit companies, it means local people controlling their local resources.

On a deeper level, the project is substantiated on the principle that humans are creative, intelligent and capable of mutual aid and cooperation. In other words, they are not solely selfish



individuals and profit maximisers, the dominant capitalist notion. To harness this collective intellect, DFNS has many self-organised academies. *Make Rojava Green Again* is written by the internationalist commune, a hub where people visiting DFNS share knowledge.

## **Rethinking Valparaíso: Rethinking the World**

Returning to Valparaíso's radical municipalist challenge to climate change, it moves in a similar direction as DFNS.

Alongside the practical measures – for instance, clearing landfills – the city is empowering residents through education. This means teaching people how to collectively adapt to and mitigate against our burning world. For instance, it has created a training institution in Cerro Alegre, a central district where students will learn how to run workers' cooperatives.

As this series has highlighted, cooperatives are a common thread for rethinking how another world is possible. In addition, environmental groups have combined to form NGO Collective Conscience, a space to share ideas and act in solidarity.

As the world continues to heat up, and as radical municipalism flourishes as a viable alternative, social ecology appears as essential and prominent – and better known – an approach as rights to the city, social inclusion or democratic control. As activists in Valparaíso know, there is no socially inclusive future when those on our cities' outskirts face the flames of climate change.

# **Rebel Cities 13: Porto Alegre In Brazil Shows How Participatory Budgeting Works (Porto Alegre, Brazil; Greensboro, North Carolina)**

Porto Alegre in Brazil is the world's first city where residents participate in budgeting decisions, having done so since 1989. But participatory democracy traces far further back. The indigenous Iroquois Confederacy co-participated in that nation's economic decisions. Now, three decades since Porto Alegre brought this wisdom to non-indigenous politics, the practice has become widespread with over 3,000 municipalities worldwide using participatory budgeting to make financial choices for their communities.

The takeaway: Citizen control of spending decisions means communities decide what their city does and does not do with public funds. In essence, this is radical municipalism. But how does it work?

## **Residents Make Million-Dollar Choices**

"Brazilian municipal governments can voluntarily adopt a program known as Participatory Budgeting," explain Brian Wampler and Mike Touchton in the Washington Post.

"This program directly incorporates citizens into public meetings where citizens decide how to allocate public funds. The funding amounts can represent up to 100 percent of all new capital spending projects and generally fall between 5 and 15 percent of the total municipal budget. This is not enough to radically change how cities spend limited resources, but it is enough to generate meaningful change."

The political scientists point out how residents in Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, another Brazilian city leading the charge, have decided on millions of dollars in spending. Nearly half of Brazil's largest cities have now adopted the method. Studies show this has resulted in local authorities spending more on education and sanitation and reducing premature deaths in infancy.

It was the Workers Party that introduced participative budgeting to Porto Alegre in 1989. Belo Horizonte followed three years later, then municipalities across Brazil came on board. The model follows an annual cycle: First, the city presents the previous year's budget for review. Then, residents attend neighborhood meetings where they offer proposals and discuss spending decisions relating to social services and big projects.

From the neighborhood assemblies councillors are elected who debate and refine the proposals. Residents also vote for delegates – around 50,000 residents – who end up voting on the final proposals.

Participatory budgeting continues today as one legacy of the Workers Party, which led Brazil from 2002 to 2016. Mirroring a trend across South America, the leftist party has since been ousted from government and is being signaled as the end of the “Pink Tide.” But participatory budgeting is one undercurrent through which the Pink Tide’s energy continues, similar to the political tide sweeping Rosario in Argentina.

## **Solutions Come To Greensboro, North Carolina**

“No one’s going to mistake [Greensboro] for a liberal enclave. In other words, according to PB’s supporters, if the process can work here, it can work anywhere,” writes Yes Magazine’s Ken Otterbourg, in describing the process that came to an unlikely place far north of Brazil: Greensboro, North Carolina.

Since the city adopted participatory budgeting in 2015, residents have decided to install real-time information on public transit. There are extra pedestrian crossings for busy roads, emergency call boxes in parks and more bus shelters.

Otterbourg emphasizes how Greensboro is hardly a city that has undergone a radical municipalist revolution, although participatory budgeting has pushed greater inclusion for communities previously separated by language, ethnicity and poverty. Similarly, the Workers Party of Brazil, which kick-started modern participative budgeting, is more connected to top-down socialism than the new bottom-up radical municipalism building in that country.

Participative budgeting has even been advocated by neoliberal financial institutions like the World Bank. The bottom line, it seems, is that across the political spectrum people are now starting to view the public-decision strategy as a vital political tool for enabling democracy.

“Participatory democracy is not a full-blown politics or ideology like anarchism, or socialism or liberalism. Rather, PD can be employed by any of those... PD is thus a transformation engine,” said writer and academic Michael Menser.

But, he clarified, participative democracy fits into radical municipalism in a way that is politically broader than many ideologies, and often serves as a bridge for many politics of the left. “Participatory democracy is not just about having a voice ... is about sharing power. Just because you have a voice doesn’t mean they listen to you. And even if they do listen to you, it doesn’t mean they obey you. But it’s about power, wielding it not over others, but with them.”

In practice, Greensboro currently budgets just under one \$1 million for participatory budgeting, from its nearly half a billion dollar budget. It pools proposals from the community and whittles down what it considers affordable and achievable. Then it holds extensive seminars, where a final short-list is decided upon by residents who are divided into city districts.

## **New York, Newcastle And Beyond**

Participatory budgeting varies in the amount of money allocated and in the means by which citizens can participate. In Spain’s Catalonia, in the town of Celrà, the radical independence and municipalist CUP party is aiming to hand over all budget decision-making to the public.

In New York, residents can now access a special map with drop pins, where they can give their specific ideas about how to improve transit, housing and other issues.

And in the U.K., Newcastle has joined a pan-European city network called Particepando, aiming to create a “cleaner, greener, safer” city. Within this model, known as Udecide, a random selection of volunteers and specialists form a working group, in conjunction with residents, who can input ideas through participatory events.

Madrid, like many cities in Spain, underwent a radical municipalist revolution in 2015, one feature of which is the site now used by residents, Decide.Madrid.es. The online platform creates a channel to gauge and harness levels of public support on key issues and public spending decisions. Ideas and proposals can be up/down voted, moving into a final stage of resident voting in which the top ideas are submitted into the first draft of the city plan.

Looking more broadly, even in places where only a small amount of public money is allocated for participatory budgets, the trends are clear: the citizen-led strategy increases voter and political engagement. And from a radical municipal perspective, participative budgeting is just one tool that today is helping citizens make their governments obey the will of the people.

## **Rebel Cities 14: In Montevideo, People-Power Keeps Pushing Uruguay's Pink Tide (Montevideo, Uruguay)**

In Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, the city council guarantees the right to housing. Few cities anywhere in the world can make this claim. And Uruguay was under a brutal dictatorship as recently as 1985.

Life expectancy in Uruguay is 77 years; it may soon overtake the United States where life expectancy averages 79. Uruguay has universal healthcare and one doctor per 270 people, compared to 1 to 390 in the U.S. Also unlike the U.S., the small South American country is considered one of the world's 20 "full democracies," according to The Economist's global rankings.

That's not all. Uruguay outstrips the U.S. in its use of renewable energy, currently producing almost all of its electricity needs from clean power sources. That compares to a world average of one-fifth use of renewables.

But Uruguay is in some ways fighting an uphill battle. It is wedged between Argentina and Brazil, two giant South American neighbors where rightwing governments have taken over from the leftwing politics that dominated the early 21<sup>st</sup> century across the region. Uruguay remains the exception: Its leftwing government is still in power.

One of the key reasons for this is the counter-power demonstrated by the well-organized bottom-up movements within the country. Across South America, radical municipalism played a key role in generating and sustaining the Pink Tide across the continent. It has also evolved to help overcome that movement's failings (see parts 1, 10, 12 and 13).

### **Progressive Tactics: A Short History Of Frente Amplio**

The party Frente Amplio (Broad Front) has led the nation since 2005, and is renowned continentally and worldwide with policies that include legalizing marijuana, abortion and gay marriage. Water and sanitation are recognized in Uruguay as a human right. Minimum wage has risen more than two-fold. By 2009, every schoolchild was given a laptop.

Yet despite the advances, Uruguay is no utopia. Montevideo has homelessness and poverty like every other capital. But its citizens' right to housing has been secured by its active housing cooperative movement, which has in turn pushed Frente Amplio to implement radical change. Sometimes understated, Uruguay's bottom-up demonstration of power helps explain both the country's radical past and its upward trajectory today.

Uruguay and Frente Amplio's progressive story is often told through its recent President José "Pepe" Mujica, who served from 2010 to 2015. Admired as the "poorest president in the world," Mujica walked the talk about socially progressive policies. As an armed anti-capitalist guerilla during the dictatorship, he was imprisoned and tortured. As president, he gave away the presi-

dential palace for use by refugees, donated most of his earnings to single mothers, drove an old Beetle and lived in a small house. Yet the foundations of Uruguayan progressive politics began far earlier.

Colonialism decimated Uruguay's indigenous peoples to an extreme degree even by western hemisphere standards. As a result, its population mainly descends from southern European migrants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, warlords ruled.

But in 1903, everything changed. José Batlle y Ordóñez became president and led a transformative egalitarian revolution that included free healthcare and education, taxation on landowners, strong unions and a constitution that empowered women and the working class. This world-leading socialism went beyond the president, as strong unions and a feminist movement based in bottom-up anarchist thinking played crucial roles as well.

Based on its strong social and legal foundations, Uruguay prospered for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so much that it became known as "South America's Switzerland." Then, an economic crisis in the 1950s driven by global factors caused inequality to spiral, leading to social tensions. Using Robin Hood-like tactics, violent Tupamaro guerrillas fought against growing injustice, among them a young Mujica. Many were killed and captured by the army. In a coup in 1973, a brutal dictatorship representing landowners took power.

General strikes helped end the dictatorship in 1985. The Tupamaro joined socialists, left-leaning Christians and Communists to form the Broad Front. Trade unions were key, bringing their legacy of collective organizing into the movement. The party's second president, Mujica is often mythologized for his past words and deeds, not least blasting capitalism and consumerism on the international stage.

Critics in turn point out that he has done deals with capitalists, leading to intense debates about whether he was exercising pragmatism or selling out. But one thing even Mujica's critics can admit is how he has maintained respect for the most marginalized Uruguayans.

Importantly, despite the way it's often told in HIStory, one man seldom changes the world. This is shown clearly in Montevideo's successful fight for fair housing.

## **Fight For Your Housing Rights**

Last year, Montevideo's Mayor Daniel Martinez strengthened the city's ties to the housing movement that has been active for 50 years and affirmed the right to housing. In practical terms, this meant that the Frente Amplio-led city increased its commitment to a *cartera de tierras* (land bank).

Land banks are a form of municipal administration that recycles unused land within the city, giving it to residents through cooperatives in Montevideo. They also assist with finance. Even before the sub-prime crisis devastated U.S. cities, land-banks were active in places falling to ruin after their capitalist heydays.

The housing cooperatives in Montevideo and Uruguay are participatory, democratic and inclusive for anyone who needs housing. Currently, 25,000 families are organized into 560 cooperatives through the Uruguayan Federation of Mutual-Aid Housing Cooperatives (FUCVAM). It views housing as a commons, not a private right. The federation finds unused land and builds homes through collective work supported by the government. Last year, FUCVAM received grants to build 409 homes for 11 cooperatives in Montevideo and nationally.

This doesn't mean that Frente Amplio, which has governed the city and the country, deserves all the credit. To the contrary, in 2007, two years after the party rose to government, it found itself in direct conflict with FUCVAM. The housing cooperative occupied buildings in direct action against the bureaucracy in support of co-ops. Frente Amplio voted in the parliament to have the occupiers put in prison.

## **People Power Unlocks Social Change**

To Frente Amplio's credit, the cooperative movement's fight ultimately pressured the party at city council and higher government levels to support cooperative housing. More broadly, Frente Amplio has continued to implement radical social change nationally through healthcare investment, providing laptops for each child, a renewables revolution and other progressive measures.

At the city level, Montevideo's city council supports vulnerable and neglected individuals by providing training, support and incubation to small enterprises for people in need of assistance. One recipient, a former Guantánamo inmate from Syria named Ahmed Ahjam, recently opened a bakery as a result.

Uruguay's next elections are in 2019. To keep the Pink Tide rising, and to avoid some of the mistakes and failures of the countries around it, learning from struggles like the kind led by the housing cooperatives will be essential.

# **Rebel Cities 15: Municipalism In Venezuela Offers A Pathway Beyond Authoritarianism (Communes, Venezuela)**

The deep social and political crisis in Venezuela has polarized global opinion. Some on the left cheer the social welfare programs that former President Hugo Chavez accomplished, while for many advocates of free market capitalism, Venezuela is the new Soviet Union exemplifying that socialism cannot work. Both of these accounts are oversimplified. They also overlook a key dimension that could help overcome the current disaster.

The Venezuelan revolution has two poles: an authoritarian, bureaucratic croynism fighting against a bottom-up leftism. But it was the latter that lifted Chavez into power in 1998 after years of struggles in the barrios.

Another dimension often overlooked by those advocating a capitalist counter-revolution is the fact that pre-1998 Venezuela was a deeply unequal state where social and economic problems ran deep.

Despite its current socialist direction, Venezuela is suffering from an economic crisis that was capitalism's making. Its over-dependence on oil has ruined the economy, most recently because of the drop in the price of curd. But the problems with this Dutch disease go deeper, since the oil industry effectively overwhelms the country's other productive ventures.

A key example: since oil money encouraged food imports, Venezuela's own food production dropped. Now that the oil price has plummeted, the country faces food shortages.

The fact is, the solution to these crises can be found at the very origins of the revolution: in bottom-up communalism.

## **El Maizal Commune**

Venezuela has more than 1,000 communes: geographical areas bonded by their historical identity, and in many cases comprising indigenous communities.

In the northwestern plains and mountains, El Maizal is one of these successful communes. A cooperative of around 2,000 families of farmers, El Maizal has, since 2009, taken over 600 hectares of previously unproductive farmland to grow corn and raise livestock.

Through sharing of communal profits, the commune built itself houses with electricity, invested in schooling and health services, and created its own cooperatives, including a dairy and one that distributes cooking fuels.

Decisions at El Maizal are made by citizen assemblies in communal councils, formed by around 250 families each. In turn, these councils send representatives to a parliament composed of communes, where representatives must rotate their roles every two years.



The communes give people sovereignty through self-governance, participation and direct democracy. This happens through committees, for instance, ones focusing on women's rights or providing universal water access. Communes provide themselves with social banking. And land can be held in three ways: privately, by the state, or democratically by the people.

Communes in Venezuela have already empowered people, but their full potential remains unrealized. In 2006, under Chavez, the commune system was rolled out as a decentralizing national plan. But officials in the top-down party, and state, have often resisted the project.

## **Communes Against The Elite, Old And New**

The communes were given land when properties were redistributed away from Venezuela's elite. But despite ambitious rhetoric for change, the process of decentralization moved slowly. When Chavez died, there were only 50 communes in the country.

Internal and external factors have curtailed the communes' success. Katrina Kozarek, a commune participant, explained that many urban communes have often failed to create self sufficiency and genuine workers' cooperatives. Instead, they have been distributing food and national welfare.

Communes have faced opposition from Venezuela's governing politicians, and the current economic, political and social crises have reduced the impetus for creating more of them. The decentralization of Venezuela's communes is also limited in scope when compared with what has been accomplished in Rojava and Chiapas. For instance, many of Venezuela's communes do not have financial sovereignty and receive funding from the state.

El Maizal is one commune that has moved away from this dependency, but it has not been easy. And the conflict clearly illustrates the fight occurring within the Venezuelan revolution.

## **El Maizal vs. Top-Down Rule**

Angelo Prado is an organizer who sees the commune as a means to transform Venezuela. Quoted in Venezuela Analysis, he said: "The commune, with its dynamic of production and participation, can also help free us from our dependence on private capital and on government patronage. So long as, the 'cells' are built across the country and we also work to develop people's political conscience, a new culture and new relations between communities that prioritize the common good, then we can make strides towards this model of society that comandante Chávez proposed."

Judging by his supporters, Prado isn't alone in suggesting that the Venezuelan government has overlooked communes. In December 2017, he ran for office in local government on a commune platform and won. The government has since refused to recognize his victory, while the commune has vowed to fight in court until their candidate has been declared mayor.

Another issue that has put El Maizal in a Catch-22 situation is the country's nationalized seed company, which won't sell seeds to the communes due to shortages, cronyism and bureaucracy. However, the company sells to illegal wholesalers, and El Maizal has been going to them for their product.

Due to the many contentious issues, the state has sent troops to intimidate the commune and even burnt fields of crops as reprisal.

## Other Communes Rising

The battle between communes and the new establishment is also shown in Jose Pio Tamayo Commune, also in northwest Venezuela. Like other successful communes, it has united with a worker-run factory, and managed to take over a brewery when it was due to be liquidated. Nepotistic state officials unsuccessfully tried to block the takeover.

The communes have grown more in rural areas than urban. One exception is Commune El Panal 2021 near the capital, Caracas. The commune's cooperative activities include sugar-packing, baking, textiles and growing crops. It also has plans to create its own local currency to counter the skyrocketing inflation and develop self-administration beyond government control. Again, these moves have been resisted by Venezuela's national politicians.

Another commune epitomizing the struggle is Commune Negro Miguel in northern Venezuela, which has occupied land for farming plantains. Both the old land-owning elite and the new socialist-branded elite are so far resisting this people-power.

It seems fitting that before his death, Hugo Chavez said, "La comuna o nada", "the commune or nothing," to describe the future of the country. He created a rallying call for bottom-up leftists against the elites of Venezuela, be they capitalists or party officials. The contradiction goes a long way to sum up Venezuelan politics – for Chavez's call could also help stop the collapse of Venezuelan society itself.

# **Rebel Cities 16: Cape Town Housing Movement Uses Occupy Tactics To Battle Apartheid'S Legacy (Cape Town, South Africa)**

“It was an important milestone and victory for poor and working class people in the struggle for decent affordable housing,” members of a housing activist group in Cape Town, South Africa, called Reclaim the City, said following a recent municipal government announcement to build hundreds of social housing apartments in the Waterfront area of the city center.

This news this fall was testament to the pressure mounted by the housing movement that continues to make ground in a city still strongly divided by racial inequality. Founded two years ago, Reclaim the City employs a broad range of tactics that include occupying government land and leading a popular participative movement of tenants and workers. Their movement works outside the city's institutions to pressure action, demonstrating an effective pathway and model for radical municipalism.

## **The Long Walk To Equality**

Social movements that succeed pushing cities to build social housing in central, desirable locations is an achievement anywhere. In Cape Town, it is more remarkable and desperately needed. The city is built on structural racism, which was set into law during South Africa's apartheid period of 1948 to 1994.

Now, a quarter of a century after the fall of apartheid, the city still faces a long journey toward economic equality. The legacy of apartheid remains especially visible in the realm of housing, which makes Cape Town's decision even more notable a milestone.

South Africa is hardly alone. Housing reveals racial inequality in many global cities. Groups excluded by race and class often either live in cramped conditions in city centers where they face the threat of eviction from gentrification – a process many see as a form of social cleansing. Elsewhere, the poorest live on cities' outskirts in shanty towns, favelas, slums and projects.

South Africa's excluded live in townships. Under apartheid and following the 1950 Group Areas Act, South Africans were divided by racial groups. The most prestigious homes were reserved for whites only. People of mixed descent were allocated in less desirable housing. Black people native to South Africa were forced into townships with the worst living conditions. Even today, the towns lack running water and sanitation, and homes are often of poor quality, made from corrugated iron and other waste materials.

Inequality is particularly stark in Cape Town. Billionaires moor their super-yachts in the same Waterfront area where the new social houses are to be built. It is truly a tale of two cities: the

whites with money shop and relax in the Waterfront area, while the predominantly poorer black population travels for hours to reach work in the same Waterfront area. This type of inequality has only been compounded by Cape Town's recent drought.

## **Occupying 'Public Land' to Make it Public**

Reclaim the City was born in early 2016, founded by Ndifuna Ukwazi, a clinic of lawyers who advocate on behalf of social justice issues and provide information for community activism and human rights. Conceived of as a tenant and workers movement, its first aim was to pressure the government to turn publicly held land into social housing rather than sell it off to developers.

In autumn 2016, the local government was far from interested in listening to Reclaim the City. Members of the organization visited municipality offices to discuss turning the former site of a school into social housing. But the city refused to even come down from their offices for the meeting. So Reclaim the City occupied the building's lobby.

Reclaim the City has not only held sit-ins in government offices. They have also occupied empty publicly owned properties. One example is the abandoned Helen Bowden Nurse's Home, a Waterfront property occupation that Cape Town's premier wants to end.

In March 2017, people who lacked affordable housing occupied the buildings that formerly housed nurses. The site had been deemed suitable for social housing as early as 2012, but the Western Cape government had ignored the proposal.

Along with the occupation, Reclaim the City is also pushing through official channels. For instance, it wrote to the city's deputy mayor about converting a plot of public land in the Green Point area into public housing.

Ndifuna Ukwazi, which translates as "dare to know," carries out strategic litigation including cases aimed at pushing for the right to housing, and often takes claims from residents to challenge specific housing sales or evictions. Recently the group uncovered how the local government drastically undersold a large plot of Cape Town to a developer.

The occupied former nurses' home has become a focal point in the Cape Town housing struggle. Controversies surround the occupation; one being the unanswered questions around a dubiously expensive security contract taken out by the municipality. One of the security contractors is accused of murdering a Reclaim the City activist, Zamuxolo Dolophini.

In another matter of unanswered questions, researcher Crispian Olver is publicly asking whether Western Cape officials have something to hide, after he successfully got information about housing policies in cities across South Africa – but was denied his requests by the Western Cape administration.

## **Progress Towards Reclaiming Cape Town**

Taking small steps, one at a time, Reclaim the City and its allies are gradually forcing Cape Town to move away from its ongoing housing apartheid. The September victory in the Waterfront area follows an announcement last summer that Cape Town would build social housing in 10 other inner city locations.

Brett Herron, who sits on the mayoral committee responsible for managing housing and transport, called the city's decision to address housing inequality a u-turn in Western Cape policy.

Meanwhile, Helen Zille, the Premier of Western Cape, responded to Reclaim the City's occupation of the former nurses' home with a comment revealing just how out of touch many in power still remain touch: "The illegal occupation of Helen Bowden Nurses Home... remains a real threat to our ability to proceed with affordable housing."

# **Rebel Cities 17: Goma’S Non-Violent Movement For Water & Peace In War-Torn Congo**

## **(Goma, DR Congo)**

Peaceful protesters in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are facing violent, state-orchestrated repression ahead of elections scheduled for Dec. 23.

Headlines about a place beyond hope support the generalizations of war-torn DRC. Racist assertions that depict the African continent needing charity and Western intervention are myths. But these stereotypes can be shattered, in this case, by exploring who the protesters are and the causes of perpetual violence against them.

One group facing repression in DRC is Lucha, a horizontal citizens movement. Within the global radical municipalist sphere, little attention is paid to the African continent as a whole. Our series attempts to rebalance this with features on Cape Town’s housing movement and upcoming stories about Senegal’s Y’en a Marre and Tunisia’s Jemna.

### **Goma and Beyond**

The city of Goma in eastern DRC had suffered constant flooding due to inadequate drainage. In 2012, residents came together to form Lucha. It now has branches in every major DRC city, including the capital Kinshasa. Lucha works to improve water security and combat poverty at the municipal level, challenging endemic corruption and violence nationally.

Lucha is short for ‘Lutte pour le Changement’ (“Struggle for Change”). Fred Bahuma, one of the group’s co-founders, explained why young people have joined this fight for basic dignity and health. Speaking to the Pambazuka news platform, Bahuma said:

“In DRC there’s more than 70% unemployment and about 90% youth unemployment. We live without electricity, while we could have one of the biggest hydroelectric dams in the world; we do not have access to drinking water, while we are called the water paradise because we have permanent sources of drinking water between rivers and regions with regular rain throughout the year; we live in insecurity, while we could be one of the political giants of Africa. There are deaths at each moment, and we’ve got tired of counting the people that have died around us. So a group of young people got together to say that we had to do something different.”

In 2014, Lucha mobilized thousands to march for the right to water in Goma. As well as marches, the movement has organized sit-ins against local governors and others to press for change, and launched petitions as well as penned open letters. Its “Goma Wants Water” message flooded the streets on banners, t-shirts and cars. In April 2018, Lucha organized a march in the capital on the theme: “Kinshasa is filthy”.

At the heart of the movement is a do-it-yourself spirit. In Goma in particular, every week activists participate in work across the city to rebuild roads and other civic projects, leading by example. Another Lucha co-founder, Micheline Mwendike, explained what makes it a citizen's movement:

"We want to create spaces of expression and action with the objective of changing our country. We reject the path of violence, as well as the path of power... We want to be the alternative for Congo, a group of engaged people that accept the challenge of telling the truth and speak for ourselves."

Lucha works horizontally, without a leader, with practical issues managed collectively. Decisions are made through a general assembly and everyone can bring proposals to meetings.

## **Peacefully Challenging Violence**

Lucha's actions are similar to those of other democratic movements happening within the radical municipalist frame across the world. But its reality is something distinct: it exists in the face of extreme violence in DRC. Another movement co-founder, Luc Nkulula, died in his house in a fire on April 10, 2018. Allegations point toward a state sanctioned murder. Nkulula was at the forefront of the campaign to force President Joseph Kabila to hold elections, which are scheduled for later this month.

Human Rights Watch reported that between 2015 and 2018, nearly 300 protesters, most of them peaceful, were killed by DRC state forces. But it would be too one-dimensional to blame only Kabila's government. The ongoing violence in DRC is the product of years of international efforts to colonize and loot the country; the Congo remains extremely rich in resources while its people are desperately poor. For example, Goma, where Lucha is mobilizing for the right to water, stands just next to Lake Kivu, the eighth largest lake in Africa.

## **From Slavery to Colonialism to War**

When people join Lucha, part of their introduction to the movement involves learning about the history of the DRC. Even a brief overview shows one overarching theme: A circle of violence has enriched a select few people working in tandem with international powers to impoverish and oppress the majority.

In President Kabila's DRC, children are forced to work and die in mines, while fighting over the minerals. The profits of this grotesque market go to western and Chinese corporations, which further enable global over-consumption.

Before president Kabila came to power in 2001, the Congo suffered two wars – one in 1996-'97, the other in 1998–2003 – which were considered the deadliest anywhere since WWII. In the end, these bloodbaths came down to locals fighting over scraps while the riches went to mining companies, big banks and arms dealers overseas.

Between 1965 and 1997, the Congolese people endured a brutal dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, who renamed the country Zaire. He was supported by the West and multinational corporations, and came to power in a coup with CIA and Belgian backing. Mobutu's men killed Patrice Lumumba, DRC's first elected president.

What happened before Congo gained independence in 1960 is similar. The Belgians grew very rich from their colony and the locals were brutalized. King Leopold II was responsible for the worst period, killing an estimated 10 million people, many of whom were worked to death for rubber. Before this era, the British Empire had enslaved Congolese.

The creation of Lucha in 2012 is all the more remarkable because it happened during another violent chapter in the DRC. Goma was the epicentre of the bloody M23 rebellion in 2012-'13, where fighting intensified due to soldiers who came off the genocide experience in Rwanda, another ex-Belgian colony.

Make no mistake: Lucha's peaceful struggle is taking place in one of the most dangerous places in the world. But, like radical municipalists everywhere, and here even more so, the movement shows there are hopes and alternatives. Many Congolese are determined to rebuild their country and break from long-term cycles of violence and poverty. To fulfill this goal, they also need the Global North to change its activities. This doesn't mean increasing aid, but rather stopping the looting of the country's mineral riches, and facilitating reparations for the centuries of colonialism and slavery.



# **Rebel Cities 18: Eight Years After Jasmine Revolution, Jemna Is Tunisia'S Oasis Of Hope (Jemna, Tunisia)**

Eight years ago on Monday, Tunisia's dictator President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country as the people declared a revolution that ushered in the Arab Spring. The struggle for democracy still continues today in the north African nation, and radical municipalism plays an important, often undiscussed role – particularly in Jemna.

Jemna is a south Tunisian oasis famous for its 'deglet nour' ("dates of light"), fruits that have long nourished locals. Jemna is also gaining a reputation as a beacon of people power. Tunisia continues to lead the region with socially progressive momentum, especially in comparison to the extreme violence and bloody aftermath of other democratic uprisings across the Middle East since 2011.

## **Retaking Jemna**

People in Jemna reclaimed their land two days before Ben Ali fled as the Jasmine Revolution was germinating across Tunisia and beyond. Jemna occupies 185 hectares, about two-thirds the size of the City of London. Through a community committee known as the Association for the Protection of Jemna's Oases (APJO), the took over the region's agricultural management. Before being controlled by collaborators of two Tunisian dictators (1957–2011) and, more previously, French colonialists (1912–1956), Jemna had sold dates as its cash-crop.

Now, it is returning to those traditions. Since locals have recovered their ancestors' land, date production – and employment in the industry – has increased significantly. More broadly by 2016, APJO had reinvested \$630,000 toward community projects. The people of Jemna refurbished primary and secondary school buildings, built a community health center and covered communal marketplace, and bought an ambulance.

Global media elevates Tunisia as the Arab Spring success story. But this ignores the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (also known as Rojava) and specifically the Kurdish feminist democratic project where, like in Jemna, organizing for revolution predates 2011.

Although Tunisia has moved beyond its post-dictatorship moment – for instance, by writing a new constitution that enshrines women's rights – the struggle for progress continues. Tunisians have been out on the streets of capital Tunis and across the country, often facing violent repression, to prevent new austerity measures. The people have organized against counter-revolutionary forces within the parliament that seek to wind the clock back and give the country's elites the lion's share of its wealth, harkening back to the Ben Ali days. The country has also suffered deadly fundamentalist attacks.

Jemna's relationship with Tunisia's various national governments since 2011 showcases the country's struggle for sovereignty struggle. Tunisia's Department for Properties and Land Affairs has legally challenged APJO saying that the land is state owned so the association cannot sell its harvest. In reaction, APJO took its dates to market, drawing national solidarity and becoming a symbol of the bottom-up, ongoing Jasmine Revolution.

## **Jasmine Revolution: Eight Years On**

Jemna is one among many local and grassroots movements in the country. Another focal point is women's empowerment: Tunisia has strong women's rights built into its constitution. For this, the national government does not deserve credit but instead the diverse social movements.

For instance, in Sidi Bouzid in 2017, former female graduates occupied space outside public institutions asserting "Manich Sekta" ("I won't stay quiet"), a movement that escalated to hunger strikes to demand equal employment opportunities for women. Sidi Bouzid is the central Tunisian city where fruit seller Mohammed Bouazizi set himself afire amid rampant corruption and poverty in late 2010, igniting the Arab Spring.

Other current feminist movements in Tunisia include Aswat Nissa, which runs workshops helping women enter politics; Chaml, a group that promotes feminism through blogs and workshops; and Chouf, composed of audiovisual activists who fight for women's sexual rights.

Reclaiming land in Jemna is also enabling women's empowerment, not least as global agribusiness frequently exploits a workforce heavily made up of women. In this light, Jemna and radical municipalism can be seen as novel projects in decentralisation: where people are demanding local sovereignty connected more broadly to Tunisian social movements that were initiated on the streets in 2011. The Jasmine Revolution simultaneously rejected both Ben Ali as a dictator and his economic program that followed the international neoliberal order, establishing a more just social and political model to strive for.

A year ago, in January 2018, renewed mass protests against proposed austerity measures grew so large in Tunisia that the international media suggested the Arab Spring had restarted. More accurately, Tunisia is in a constant state of dynamic protests as social movements contest attempts by elites to maintain or extend their control in the sphere of international finance.

Similar protest themes also show the continuity of resistance and progress. In the summer of 2012 following the Jasmine Revolution, the "Protests Against Thirst" and "Manich Mymeh" ("I do not forgive") emerged, in 2015 and 2017, respectively. In between those were a series of 2016 protests against unemployment, followed in 2018 by the "Fach Nestannaow" ("What are we waiting for?") wave of dissent.

In the midst of these dynamic, turbulent and also at times violent situations, Tunisia has seen relative success, with achievements including its writing of a reasonably progressive constitution. But it continues to face severe economic problems, including escalating inequality and unemployment, as the country's elites continue their efforts to rewind the clock, push austerity and centralize power.

More profoundly, Tunisia's social successes lie in the social movements' resistance, which has avoided the kinds of counter-revolutionary coups that devastated neighbouring countries, most notably Egypt.

The relative success of Tunisia's young democracy was revealed when the crown prince of Saudi Arabia toured the region after the brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Tunisia was the only Arab nation where protests against the crown prince were tolerated.

## **Tunisian Municipal Elections**

Another success was Tunisia's first ever municipal elections, which after many delays were held on May 6, 2018. There, Tunisians elected local representatives in a process that again showed how the country has broken ground and moved on from its centralized legacy. For instance, mandated by its constitution, half of all those people elected for each party were women.

On the other hand, the process of rolling out local government reforms also faces severe challenges. Turnout in the election was approximately a third of potential voters, mirroring the low numbers in places like the United States.

One reason for the lack of political engagement is Tunisia's historic legacy of dictatorship, in which power remained centralised as it was during colonial times. This is a problem for many nearby countries, where post-colonial life means local strongmen have often headed systems that served multinational interests rather than the people's. Local democracy needs a chance to show its worth.

One part of the solution, therefore, is that social movements make the most of the new constitution and further push its evolution. But examples such as Jemna also stand out as examples of Tunisians taking local control of their future. According to Jacobin, 60,000 hectares of state-owned agricultural land in Tunisia has also been re-appropriated via similar self-organized communities.

As Taher Etahri, president of the Association for the Protection of Jemna's Oases, said, quoted by Open Democracy: "The experience is rich in lessons. We are no longer under the tutelage of the state; we act for public good. Everybody is looking up at Jemna, which makes us stronger and in more solidarity with each other."

# **Rebel Cities 19: Gdansk's Murdered Mayor Was Leading the Polish Charge Against Fascism (Gdansk, Poland)**

One of the world's leading municipalist innovators, Gdansk's Mayor Pawel Adamowicz, was murdered on Jan. 13 before a live television audience. In this article, Occupy.com pays tribute to Adamowicz by focusing on Gdansk's citizens' assemblies that he was instrumental in helping build, and which he saw as a democratic tool that could facilitate democracy in Poland and beyond.

## **Pawel Adamowicz (1965–2019)**

Adamowicz's killing during a televised charity concert, where he was stabbed by a member of Poland's far-right, symbolized the ways that Poles are continuing to resist the country's lurch toward fascism.

The tragedy was similar to the murder of British MP Jo Cox, who was killed just before the 2016 Brexit referendum. Both politicians were assassinated by a violent individual, although the motive of Adamowicz's murderer is still not clear whereas Cox was killed by a far right terrorist.

What does seem clear is that Adamowicz would not have been killed were it not for the violent discourse that has been building across the country, increasingly normalizing violent acts and hateful rhetoric directed against marginalized groups and individuals.

In this case, Poland's state prosecutor decided that a far-right organization which had released mock death certificates of Adamowicz, and other human rights advocates, didn't warrant prosecution. How wrong that prosecutor was.

In death, Pawel Adamowicz deserves – and has received – global attention, somewhat the way that Marielle Franco was widely recognized after her tragic killing in Brazil. Both figures broke ground by standing up for marginalized groups through municipal politics. Through citizens' assemblies and other policies, Adamowicz resisted the far-right in Poland just as Marielle had resisted authoritarianism in Brazil.

Globally, the far-right is marching, making steady ground against the deepening crises of liberal democracy and capitalism. As this series has shown, municipalism offers a means to resist fascism through democratic alternatives. The citizens' assemblies of Gdansk, created during Adamowicz's tenure, are another key tool to create real democracy locally and globally.

## **Gdansk's Citizens' Assemblies are an Antidote to Encroaching Fascism**

Gdansk's democratic citizens' assemblies have occurred even as Poland has shifted notably to the right. The PiS nationalist government, since 2015, has drawn international condemnation for attacking the judiciary and women's and LGBT rights, as well as enabling – and in some cases leading – fascist demonstrations.

Three citizens' assemblies have moved Gdansk in the opposite direction. The last one strengthened civic participation, including bolstering rights for women, the LGBT community and migrants. Measures included promoting civic initiatives in municipal media, training teachers to counteract discrimination against marginalized and persecuted communities, and enabling school students to co-create their own curriculum.

“Another recommendation was tackling violence against women, including increasing funding to support services for survivors,” the citizens' assemblies coordinator Marcin Gerwin explained. “The city will also examine how the men and women's sports are financed, and one example is that the women's rugby had worse access to the field, not to mention less money.”

Gdansk's other two citizen assemblies tackled smog pollution and the impact of climate change. Addressing severe smog in cities across Poland has become a key focus galvanizing municipalist actions, including in Warsaw. Through municipalist organizing, Gdansk is aggressively pushing against the nationalist government's climate denial.

### **How Has Gdansk Organized its Citizens' Assemblies?**

After severe flooding caused by climate change, Gerwin proposed a citizens' assembly to Mayor Adamowicz. The mayor agreed, building on Gdansk's participatory budgeting process that has ongoing since 2013.

Citizens' assemblies in Gdansk were given the authority to make decisions, so long as 80 percent of the participants agreed (known as consensus-20). Firstly, using the electoral role, invitations are sent randomly to create a body of citizens that are representative of the city. Around 60 people attend, forming a city in miniature that is representative by age, gender, district and education level.

The group meets on a weekend and participants are given lunch with expenses paid. The group starts with a learning phase that is open to any stakeholders, for instance charities or businesses. The group looks at the problems they face and considers the possible solutions. When it came to dealing with climate-related floods, one solution was to keep a lake half full to absorb excess overflow.

The first meeting produces initial recommendations. The public can comment and provide input before the next meeting. Then the feedback is reviewed and the suggestions narrowed down. Trained facilitators enable the meetings, where people talk in groups of three or four. The facilitators use an algorithm that ensures as many people get to speak to one other before their ideas are brought back to the wider group. The meeting style is based on the ‘World Cafe’ method.

Gdansk's nearly half million citizens can also request that the mayor initiate a citizens' assembly with 1,000 signatures, or they can demand one with 5,000 signatures. Anyone interested in replicating a citizens' assembly can read this guide in English.

## Thinking Beyond the Box

The citizens' assembly model provides a means to create demographic participation, which is particularly useful in cities or municipalities without a strong tradition of assemblies, for instance in places like Chiapas; Rojava, Syria, and Catalonia.

But even in places with a strong current of local assemblies, citizens' assemblies can help tackle big decisions. One theme that's evident after speaking to municipalists worldwide for this series is the fact that people can "take back the city" without taking control of civil servants. A common sentiment from radical municipalists is this: "We are transforming the city, but a big ship takes a long time to change course."

A positive aspect of citizens' assemblies, explained Gerwin, is that they're able to overcome the lack of civil servants with high quality and ambitious recommendations.

"For instance, the council before [the smog assembly] was removing 100 to 200 coal furnaces annually. Now the citizens say, we want all 10,000 coal furnaces removed within five years. The civil servants say 'But how?'"

Another recommendation to democratize schools has been similar. "This radical proposal gained over 80 percent support," he continued. "The civil servants again ask, 'How?' as they cannot implement what they don't understand, but it is evolving. The mayor is listening. You need an open mayor. In the short term it is hard for civil servants, but then citizens will appreciate the recommendations."

## Globally Harnessing the Wisdom of the Crowd

Gdansk evolved its citizens' assemblies model from Australia, adding important aspects, not least that the mayor gave the assemblies the power to make decisions. There have also been citizens' assemblies in the Polish city of Lublin, with interest from other elected representatives across Poland.

Looking abroad, a citizens' assembly was used in the Irish referendum to end abortion. Now there is talk of using it to overcome the impasse over Britain's Brexit. Building on the experience of Gdansk and other successful citizens' assemblies, many feel the moment is ripe for Britain to evolve its democratic governance.

To borrow a phrase from Iceland – itself a laboratory for crowd-sourcing democracy – citizens' assemblies realize "the wisdom of the crowd". Among other legacies, Pawel Adamowicz deserves global acclaim for having the foresight and the trust to harness the wisdom of his municipality.

# Rebel Cities 20: With Hip-Hop As Sound Track, Young Senegalese Say Enough Is Enough (Dakur, Senegal)

*“The leaders hang on to the power  
In spite of the opposition of the population.  
Politicians are all the same, no difference.  
Only broken promises and lies.  
We are fed up of your nonsense,  
We really need change.”*

These are the lyrics of Senegal hip hop artist Keur Gui in the 2014 song “Diogoufi,” which means “Nothing has changed.” The group is active in political organizing, walking the talk of their lyrics. In 2011, its leading vocalists were at the forefront of the Senegal Y’en A Marre (“We Are Fed Up”), founded in the capital Dakur alongside other artists, academics and activists.

What sparked Y’en A Marre into existence was Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade’s aim to rewrite the country’s constitution enabling him to stay for a third term. Keur Gui’s singer Thiat was arrested and detained following a rally in Dakar’s Obélisque Square where he was accused of calling the 85-year-old president a “liar” and unfit for office.

The Y’en a Marre movement played a crucial role in Wade’s electoral defeat in 2012, when he was replaced by Macky Sall. More generally, the group rallies against the social precarity facing Senegalese society, especially its youth. Hip hop artists like Sidat Fall, aka Pacotille, have brought attention to social injustices, including the poverty of taxi drivers and the rise in sex work, driven by rising inequality.

What started in the capital broadened nationwide with a municipalist dimension and, simultaneously, spread beyond Senegal. Hip hop was one means of transmission. While global attention in 2011 focused on the Middle East and North Africa where the Arab Spring took root, and on the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy movement, what happened – and continues to happen – south of the Sahara is often neglected. There is a similar void in the global radical municipalist movement, and its discourse, across the rest of the vast African continent.

## Senegal And Y’en A Marre

After French colonial rule ended in early 1960, Senegal did not suffer the violence and wars compared to some of its neighbouring countries. But Senegal still suffered its share of corruption, infrastructure failures and other problems. In 2011, President Wade’s attempt to stay in power

came alongside regular electrical power shortages and a growing social crisis caused by austerity and increasing government corruption.

“We discussed the fact that a group of imams from [the coastal department] Guediawaye had mobilized themselves to speak out against the constant cuts in electricity. So we said to ourselves: If the elderly are taking a stand, how come we, the young, don’t?” explained journalist Aliou Sane, a founding Y’en A Marre member, said in an interview.

“We decided something had to be done. We considered founding a new political party, but quickly dismissed the idea. We felt there was a need for a new movement and area of expression, inclusive and open to all.”

Y’en A Marre organised mass rallies in Dakar that were crucial to President Wade losing the election. They mobilised people to use their vote; nonetheless, an estimated 1 million young Senegalese did not vote in the election, and even sometimes sold their votes.

But changing the president in 2012 did not end the movement’s work. Since the outset, Y’en A Marre has faced harassment, beatings and arrests by the police. It has led a bottom-up approach – similar to radical municipalists elsewhere in the world – reaching out across Senegalese society, making the movement harder to suppress en masse.

## **Decentralising Through Hip Hop and Local Chapters**

Another co-founder of Y’en A Marre, Aliou Sane, explained in the same UN interview that one of the group’s first campaigns targeted people selling their votes, under the title: #Jaay sa carte, jaay sa ngor” (“Sell your card, sell your dignity”).

“First we organized marches, but were soon stopped by the police. So we divided ourselves into smaller groups, and went around the popular blocks in town, armed with a stereo playing the Y’en A Marre single. We got stopped again and accused of disturbing public order,” said Sane.

“But as Dakar and Senegal has lots of talented young rappers, our next step was to hop on a bus, distribute flyers and rap about the country’s situation and the importance to register to vote, and then get off a couple of stops later. We also collaborated with the media and there were televised programs and shows where we appeared to raise awareness.”

Another locally focused campaign happened in the city of Rufisque, in western Senegal, where the movement created a platform allowing residents of the city to take their complaints directly to the municipal government. It was called “1000 complaints to the Government” and gave anyone who wanted the chance to have their say.

Y’en A Marre also drew its power from the way it formed into local chapters, known as “Esprits,” spread out across the country. These decentralised groups work under the principles of non-violence and inclusion, comprising at least 25 people each, with a minimum of 10 women. Today, two separate actions are hosting civic workshops and vocational training, creating hubs where all parts of Senegalese society can organise.

## **A New Type Of Senegalese**

The strategy of harnessing municipal activism – including building Esprits – in addition to holding mass rallies was not only pragmatic, helping the movement avoid some of the political violence and repression that continues across the country. Y’en A Marre also wanted to reach out



across society to push forward the idea of a New Type of Senegalese. Although the group does not define this strategy explicitly as radical municipalism, it has strong connections to the broader global trend.

As Y'en A Marre defines it, New Type of Senegalese is about encouraging civic engagement, being self critical and thinking about how you tackle society's problems. It is framed around the understanding that change will not be gifted from above, but driven from below. Ultimately, New Type of Senegalese is about demonstrating that another Senegal is possible.

## **Hip Hop Beyond Borders**

What burst out of Dakar in 2011 quickly resonated across Senegal. The Y'en Marre movement inspired the Balai Citoyen movement in neighbouring Burkina Faso, which catalysed the end of the government of Blaise Compaoré in 2014. Y'en A Marre activists have also travelled to Democratic Republic of Congo where they faced arrest for their efforts expanding democratic possibilities.

Hip hop, music and other art have driven other movements across the African continent, also those not directly linked to Y'en A Marre. These include Seun Kuti, who took a leading role in Occupy Nigeria strikes and mass actions. In South Sudan, musician-artist collective Ana Taban uses art to call for peace. And in Tanzania, the hip hop artist Joseph Mbilinyi has been elected as a Parliamentarian and this year was imprisoned for speaking out.

These creatively led movements speaks of an even broader popular protest movement that has increased across the African continent in the last decade at the same time that popular protest has increased globally. While the following words are rapped by Keur Gui about Senegal's government, the sentiment could as easily have been made about neoliberal politics the world over:

*"Lazy regime  
No vision  
Permanent mess  
No solutions  
Get out of here!"*

## **Rebel Cities 21: In India, Can People Win ‘Rights to the Megacity’? (Mumbai, India)**

For over six years, farmers living near cities in Gujarat state, in western India, have protested against being swallowed into those same cities. The state wants 12 cities to consume no less than 800 villages.

This trend threatens villagers’ livelihood, and farmers are expected to give up 40 percent of their land so that the rest rises in value. But there are claims of a land grab. Owning less land, of course, makes agriculture harder. Urban sprawl depletes the water table and pollution increases.

After large protests in 2015, 42 villages fought to be removed from the state’s expansion of cities. But most are being destroyed regardless. The plans were initiated by Narendra Modi, head of Gujarat state government from 2001 to 2014, after which he became the nation’s prime minister.

### **Moving Toward a World of Megacities?**

Gujarat reflects a global urbanization trend. While there are positive reasons for moving to cities, coercion is more often the driver. Extractive industries also push people from the land, alongside enclosures and destruction of the commons.

Indigenous communities have faced the worst consequences, marked by genocide and disease. Recently, these processes have been accelerated by industrialized war on the environment and its aftermath, such as land mine destruction and habitat loss. Multinational corporations drive new waves of colonial land grabs, not least in the realm of agribusiness, as climate change pushes millions more from their land.

By 2050, the UN expects 68 percent of people globally to be city dwellers. up from 55 percent today and 29 percent in 1950.

Asian and African cities are growing the fastest, especially in India and Nigeria. Today, India has 5 megacities, going by the UN definition of cities with 10 million-plus populations. At 27 million, India’s capital New Delhi is the second largest city in the world after Tokyo – but in 2028 it is due to surpass Japan’s capital. Estimates suggest half of New Delhi’s population lives in cramped and poor quality housing – otherwise called ‘slums’, although the word is problematic as it reinforces a power dynamic whereby authorities don’t value the residents in these neighborhoods.

Poor neighborhoods surrounding most megacities often lack basic amenities. Overcrowding or proximity to rubbish dumps causes disease and fires. Worse still, in Delhi the last few years have seen devastating fires that the residents suspect were started deliberately by authorities, in the form of so-called “slum clearances.”

## “Rights to a Megacity?”

The “Rights to the City” concept is useful to challenge authorities and elites in their attempts to prescribe solutions for these precarious areas. As Part 4 of this series discussed, these rights include accessing basic necessities such as clean air, decent homes, running water and other living essentials. Beyond that, RTTC means that people who were by and large forced into cities should have the right to shape their environment.

Across India many social movements are working from the very base of the economy upwards. This form of organizing often goes overlooked within the growing radical municipalist movement, which tends to focus on Europe, North America and South America. But municipalist galvanizing from India’s most precarious populations is hardly new.

In 1970, a focal point became the authorities’ aim to clear Janata Colony in Mumbai city. Locals, including Jockin Arputham, argued, “No eviction without alternative.” Over 1,000 settlements around the city joined in the fight, and through peaceful guerrilla tactics, civil disobedience and court orders, the movement began to frustrate the authorities.

The effort went national, and later global, as the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI). It lost the battle – Janata in the end was demolished – but altered the war. In “slum-clearances” afterwards, Indian authorities were expected to offer alternatives. But as the suspected arson in New Delhi shows, contempt for the urban poor continues.

Against this background, bottom-up organizing continues to develop across India, driving authorities to upgrade or protect what they deem precarious areas. For instance, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat’s largest city, women community leaders have galvanized the community to upgrade the Jadibanagar settlement with amenities including water taps, toilets and paved paths, as well as a 10-year guarantee of no evictions.

In Odisha state, in eastern India, 200,000 precarious homes were also given official status, lifting any eviction threat. This was pushed by bottom-up housing rights groups including the Bhubaneswar Basti Basinda Mahasangha (BBBM), which welcomed the state’s move, but added: “The government has yet to properly identify all slum dwellers ... so not all the urban poor will benefit.” As part of its 2015 campaign, BBBM held large sit-ins with a focus on meditation, known as Dharanas, outside the state governor’s house.

Tearing down stereotypes is another means to help protect residents’ rights. A striking form of this has been carried out by Chal Rang De (Let’s Go Paint), a non-profit association that paints colorful murals across the precarious settlements of Mumbai.

In Mumbai’s southeast, the Dharavi settlement is recognizable as the setting for “Slumdog Millionaire,” a film strongly criticized for pushing the stereotype of India’s slums. But one project here is working with the community to map the value of the densely populated settlement. From an outsider’s perspective, the housing might seem chaotic, but the project shows how this informal development is created with full community involvement to house a wealth of social and cultural support networks in a limited space. The way Dharavi develops from the bottom-up has been mapped by Urbz, which calls itself “an experimental action and research collective.”

This is not about romanticizing Dharavi. Like many precarious settlements, the area needs running water, sanitation, paved roads and other infrastructural improvements. But as many have voiced, the zone should not be destroyed to put people in tower blocks or other top-down planned residential units. From a Rights to the City perspective, destroying this “homegrown

city” would smash their rights to build the city – rights the residents already exercised despite their status at the bottom of the social ladder.

Prime Minister Modi started another front in the battle over India’s cities in 2015 with plans to establish 100 Smart Cities by 2022. The project was sold as bringing “housing for all, comprehensive public transport, green spaces, walkable streets, dependable water, electricity and internet connectivity, and citizen-friendly governance.” But by 2018, only five smart cities have been built. Worse still, the project is providing a glossy facade to intensify attacks on “homegrown settlements.”

Globally, the Smart City narrative is now being criticized for creating top-down cities that are ideal for suppressing human rights, as they rely on extensive surveillance. Instead of smart cities, therefore, we need to think about smart citizens. In megacities the most precarious have already exercised their right to create home-grown communities. But to fulfill all their rights to the city, residents’ key needs are access to amenities – and the simple right to remain.

# **Rebel Cities 22: Nationwide Protests Rock Vietnam's Authoritarian-Neoliberal Government**

## **(Phan Ri Cua & Binh Thuan, Vietnam)**

Widespread protests against Special Economic Zones are shaking the stability of Vietnam's government. It was unheard of that thousands of people would take to the country's streets, forcing the government to delay its plan of extending pro-business zones that allow corporations to evade regulations.

But as today's Vietnam reveals an embrace of neoliberalism and its authoritarian government becomes ever more draconian in response to opposition voices, a popular municipalist movement is on the rise that challenges the establishment power, shaking Vietnam's once all-powerful, one-party system.

### **Special Protests for Vietnam's SEZ**

300 people in Phan Ri Cua City, in Binh Thuan province, held the first rally against the country's Special Economic Zones draft law on June 7, 2018. The demonstration grew from local anger and protests over a highly polluting Chinese coal power station power.

Two days later, approximately 50,000 workers walked out from footwear companies in Ho Chi Minh City. And on June 10, demonstrations followed in cities including Hanoi, Nghe An and Da Nang.

The draft law aimed to allow foreign investors to lease Vietnamese land for 99 years. One protest theme was the rejection of further Chinese investment. Vietnam's giant northern neighbor has invaded and dominated the country for centuries. The latest ongoing dispute concerns the South China Sea, with China further militarizing the contested islands last year.

Vietnam's three special economic zones are planned for Vân Đồn, an island province in north-east Vietnam; Bắc Vân Phong, situated strategically within the South China Sea; and Phú Quốc, an island in the Gulf of Thailand. Protesters fear China will use SEZs to extend its influence more broadly.

A variety of concerns sparked Vietnam's first mass protests since the Vietnam War. Special Economic Zones have been widely criticized as they allow corporations to flout labour laws, minimum wage and workers' safety.

Chinese corporations have also caused anger due to the ecological destruction caused by an extensive bauxite mine in the Central Highlands and the Formosa Steel Company plant in Vũng Áng (Hà Tĩnh province), which spilled toxic waste causing a marine crisis on Vietnam's north coast.

The SEZ push is connected to wider government corruption and corporate land-grabs. As a result, local struggles against the policy have collectively galvanized against Vietnam's political and economic establishment.

## **Growing Authoritarianism, Growing Resistance**

June's mass protests also took aim at a new cybersecurity law that has similarities to Chinese Internet censorship legislation. Vietnam's National Assembly passed the law on June 12, 2018. Unusually, the National Assembly, which frequently rubber stamps proposals from the one-party state, halted discussions of the SEZ law until Autumn 2018, then delayed it again to May 2019. But despite the protests' impact, authorities dealt with protesters severely.

In Binh Thuan, police shot tear gas and water cannons against peaceful protesters, leading to street battles with protesters shortly occupying the regional government offices. Protesters were beaten across Vietnam, and over 1,000 were arrested.

On the streets, police used tear gas, water cannons and sound cannons in an effort to push back the demonstrators.

By November 2018, Radio Free Asia reported more than 100 people faced prison terms after the mass protests. And critics of the Vietnamese regime faced violent attacks, even before the recent popular uprising.

For context, Vietnam in 2015 changed its penal code so that those challenging the state can be sentenced to death – even for merely spreading “propaganda”. By December 2018, the Vietnam Human Rights Network reported that the country holds some 200 political prisoners. Numerous dissidents have also fled the country.

As June's SEZ protests began, many prominent activists were placed under house arrest. The pre-arrests decentralized the movement, as people from all walks of life took to the streets to protest government corruption and rising inequality.

Analyzing the growing movement for democracy, researcher Anh-Susann Pham Thi explained how it has galvanized those who are fighting against a repressive state. In doing so, activists and non-activists are facing four strategic options: “Hiding, fleeing, creating and merging.”

Hiding, said Pham Thi, means creating safe spaces to resist, or hiding in plain view, for instance through anonymous social media or graffiti. Fleeing means leaving Vietnam to somewhere safe from where activists can challenge the regime. An example of “creating” is the No-U football club, formed in 2011. (The Hanoi-based football club provides a safe space for grassroots democratic organizing and political conversations; despite harassment from the regime, it remains shielded since the government cannot prevent people's right to sport.)

The fourth way is merging, meaning that various struggles build toward an intersectional struggle. Merging transforms the struggle against Chinese influence. Otherwise it would be merely a nationalist struggle against SEZs. Through intersectionalism, the movement becomes a fight over local environmental sovereignty and the sovereignty of people against repression. Alongside decentralization, these are municipalist traits; worldwide, municipalism offers a non-nationalist basis to reject neoliberalism with arguments for local sovereignty.

## Same Same, But Different

The neoliberal economic and political ideology appears misplaced considering Vietnam's history, in which it beat the U.S. in a colonialist and ideological war of communism vs. capitalism. In reality, the people lost this war. Millions died and war crimes were extensive, including against neighboring Cambodia, sparking further genocide. The U.S. ground troops also lost in this war.

Capitalists ultimately lost and won. First, the military industrial complex profited immensely. Isolated and impoverished, Vietnam was forced to open up its economy to foreign investment. The top-down repressive state offered some programs to rebuild society, such as the minimum wage, healthcare and education. But by the mid-1990s it had fully opened its doors to neoliberalism, leading to austerity, inequality and corruption.

In essence, Vietnam took the worst of both worlds: a repressive one-party state wrapped in a red flag, pushing a hardline neoliberal agenda.

Not so long ago, Vietnam's regime seemed untouchable. For three months in early 2011, I travelled across the Central Highlands, exploring how extractive capitalism like mining destroys indigenous livelihoods.

Going to and seeing places that were technically off-limits, the corporate expansion into the country became clear. Factories swiftly rising on the edge of cities. Industrial expansion tearing through highland forests. Back then there was no sense, even from strong critics, that the status quo would or could change. The regime's strong grip started at the local level, as block wardens would report on neighborhoods to the police. You had to register to stay in people's houses. Speakers in public places broadcast government propaganda, even in remote villages.

But since summer 2018, an outburst of indignation has been widely discussed and shared by commentators. Even former party leaders are criticizing the government's direction.

The resistance is not strictly radical municipalist. It is more than noteworthy, in a global age of increased authoritarianism, how Vietnam repression is focused on blocking radical municipalist attempts to build counter power – by banning local organizing and building top-down power in the streets.

Reciprocally, as is true across continents, radical municipal tools provide the means to dismantle those forms of authoritarianism, building counter-power from the street upwards – something the Vietnamese people appear now poised to do.

## **Rebel Cities 23: Japanese Food Co-op Seikatsu Offers Hope for a Starving Planet (Seikatsu, Japan)**

“We are almost drowning in the ocean of a consumer society which prevails all over the world,” says the Japanese cooperative Seikatsu, pointing to endemic problems like unsafe food, environmental destruction, inequality and poverty. “Each problem is too huge to be tackled by an individual so we have to unite with our neighbor and neighbor’s neighbor.”

Seikatsu was co-founded in 1965 by 200 women to provide – both buying and selling – healthy milk. Today it has over 33 cooperatives selling to more than 400,000 Japanese households. The group’s slogan is “autonomous control of our lives.”

It co-owns urban milk farms with 5,000 cows and offers everything from sesame oil production to rice to sustainably caught fish. The co-op’s turnover in 2017 was more than 87 billion yen, or around \$770 million.

Not only that, Seikatsu provides cooperative-based child care and elderly care. It has assisted in the election of more than 140 co-op members to local government, many of whom are women, going against the grain of male-dominated politics in Japan and beyond.

The federation has also branched out providing green energy through the Seikatsu Club Energy Co, which launched 2014, connecting renewable energy co-ops to households. The move to into eco-energy reflects a wider green revolution happening in Japan since the 2011 Fukushima disaster demonstrated the national security risks of nuclear power.

But perhaps most significant of all, the Seikatsu model of food supply provides a working solution towards the intensifying capitalist-driven global food crisis.

### **Capitalism Starves the Earth**

Seikatsu is not exaggerating that the global food system is “drowning.” UN figures from a 2018 report show that 821 million people currently live in hunger worldwide.

UNICEF reports that 3 million children die every year from starvation, and the World Health Organization estimates annually 600 million people are made ill from unsafe food, causing nearly half a million deaths. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization meanwhile estimates that one-third of all food globally goes to waste.

Capitalism rubbishes food for many reasons. Much of it perishes on long journeys. Wholesalers penalize growers for under-supply, encouraging over-supply. Supermarkets would rather throw away waste – that is, they prefer to be overstocked than have shelves sit empty – due to the capitalist doctrine that consumers need a choice of everything, all the time. Advertising and 2-for-1 deals pushes this overconsumption onto people. Wholesalers and supermarkets also want “beautiful” food, discarding the rest.



But in the context of global hunger, making food a mere commodity is criminal. On top of the 3 million children who die from starvation each year, between 9 and 36 million adults annually starve to death. Additionally, poor nutrition cuts short million more lives.

Capitalism makes food unaffordable for many reasons. Through speculation, food costs soar while casino capitalists make a killing without touching a grain of wheat, maize or rice. Another example is countries with high malnutrition that are forced to grow cash crops for export, with pressure from institutions including the World Bank and IMF.

Capitalists are a disaster for small producers, as those small producers and laborers do the hard work and big corporations reap the profits. Again, many instances highlight this chronic injustice. Agribusiness firms often force peasants to buy “their” seeds, which lock them into buying the multinationals’ fertilizers as well – even though these seeds are the common creation of peasants’ ancestors.

Through free trade agreements, farmers of the global south must compete with farmers in the north who receive extensive subsidies. This means food is dumped on the global south, undercutting small producers. Constantly, agribusiness uses its political and economic muscle to push land grabs, violently driving farmers of their land.

Increasingly, capitalist-driven ecological crises also destroy food production. From over-industrialized farming, soil degradation shows there are only 60 years worth of harvests left in top soil; collapsing insect numbers point towards mass extinction. By 2025, 1.8 billion people will face regular droughts; forest fires are burning at unprecedented rates, our seas are overfished, and swathes of the world have been destroyed by toxic industries like the oil fields that decimated the Ogoni people’s land in Nigeria.

Climate change is already driving these crises, and will worsen their impacts. So the question becomes: how does humanity respond in a way that could help our civilization, and our species, survive the future? Seitatsu represents one of those solutions.

## **A Nourished World is Possible**

Rather than being a middle-man between producers and consumers, the Seikatsu model creates a mutual democratic relationship. At the consumption end, the co-op is divided into autonomous local branches, which are further divided into neighborhood units of about 10 households, known as “Han.”

Across Japan, there are 200 autonomous branches and many thousand Han. The Han make direct orders to the producing cooperatives. Each Han sends representatives to the branches, but it is the Han that coordinates each household’s needs and bonds the community locally.

Direct producer-consumer relationships mean both parties get a fair price, without capitalists taking a large slice. Direct ordering reduces food waste. There are also less overheads, for instance, for storage facilities as fresh local food goes directly to neighbourhoods.

Seikatsu works with producers. One example was the feedback from the Han-assisted Hirata Farm, which created Japan’s first additive-free sausage.

Seikatsu began with the goal of providing safe and healthy milk. It continues with the principle of ethical, safe and sustainably produced food, with “>standards co-written by the Han that all producers must meet. The food is GMO-free. A great deal of resources are also saved by re-using bottles and reducing packaging.

Another Seikatsu goal is increasing Japan's food self-sufficiency. This reduces food miles, reducing the carbon foot print of container ships and flights. It also takes big corporations out of the food equation, meaning Seikatsu's members do not fund land grabs in the global south. To improve Japan's food self-sufficiency, in addition to buying food locally, Seikatsu sources idle farm land to grow feed for animals, further reducing the reliance on foreign imports.

The coop still provides small amounts of foreign-sourced products like bananas and sugar cane – but these come from co-ops supporting global south co-ownership.

Considering the global food crisis, the Seikatsu model offers a clear strategy to avoid catastrophe. It provides a means whereby city dwellers can stop the extractive drain on rural areas. Beyond connections to local growers, it shows how we can stop the global south from starving, namely by stopping it from being forced to act as the global north's bread basket.

As this series has highlighted, Seikatsu is not the only way that city projects are solving the global food crisis. The urban farms of Jackson, Mississippi, are another strong example. Equally, Havana, the capital of Cuba, grows nearly 90 percent of the food it consumes, largely as a result of U.S.-led sanctions.

Globally, and in Japan, the trend is clear. Another food is both possible, and necessary.

## **Rebel Cities 24: How Catalonia's CUP Party is Helping Reclaim Towns, Cities and Nation (Catalonia, Spain)**

A radical municipalist wave took over cities in the Spanish state in 2015. The best known of the groups is Barcelona En Comu (examined in the next part of this series). But building bottom-up power has a longer history in Catalonia, and the municipalist thread interwoven into the radical Catalan independence movement offers insight into how to challenge state power – a paramount concern for municipalists everywhere.

Spain's violent reaction to the 2017 Catalan referendum, and the ongoing political trials of the region's leaders, both oppose and contrast with the bottom-up independence movement. In that dramatic moment two autumns ago, an autonomous network of neighbourhood assemblies, organising through encrypted communications, peacefully outsmarted gangs of riot cops.

Spanish reactionism galvanized Catalans to claim their country, street by street, barrio by barrio. I witnessed this first hand in Girona, north of Barcelona, where the chant "Votarem" (We will vote) rallied beyond a flag. Voting was about reclaiming sovereignty, breaking the status quo. Spanish state violence prevented Catalonia from leaving in 2017, and arguably Spanish legitimacy over the region was lost forever.

The Candidatura d'Unitat Popular, or CUP party, was seminal in driving the October 2017 referendum. The party had held the balance of power in the pro-independence Catalan Parliament since 2015, and they succeeded in transmitting the growing street fervor for independence to the Parliament.

Today, this anti-capitalist, feminist and democratic party is one of the most influential leftwing parties in Europe. It seeks to build counter-power to confront the multiple crises produced by capitalism. Radical municipalism is at its core.

### **Municipalists for Independence**

The CUP formed in the late 1980s, but only vied for municipalist elections in 2012. "Many of the participants came from organizations that resisted the dictatorship, like Movimiento de la Defensa de la Terra. The inheritance goes back to those who fought in the Spanish Civil War," Ona Curto Graupera, who is running as a CUP candidate in Arenys de Mar municipal elections this May, told me recently.

According to her colleague, Quim Arrufat, an MP with CUP between 2012 and 2015: "We consistently rejected the notion of building a national organization until we had accumulated some political power in the municipalities. We sought to work together on practical matters in order to see how to manage power, how to manage social movements, how to organize people

on a local basis, and only then build a national organization. All previous practice was conducted in the opposite direction.”

Guided by participatory assemblies, CUP participants collectively decide actions in councils and the Catalan National Parliament. As they say, the party has “one foot on the street, one in the institutions”. CUP politicians are limited to one term, with a male and female co-spokesperson. This model shares similarities to Democratic Confederalism in Rojava (DFNS), Syria, and the “Leaders obey” motto of Zapatismo.

In late 2015, I attended a national assembly in Manresa basketball stadium, near Barcelona. CUP participants were confronting a major decision over their independence dilemma: Should winning independence come before the social revolution, or visa versa? The tension was about selectively working with non-radical aspects of the independence movement in order to break with Spain, while making sure that a new state did not recreate the same power imbalances.

In Manresa, every representative reported back from local assemblies to inform the bottom-up decision. I asked Graupera, who attended, how they forged this democratic culture. “We have it in our DNA. Many Catalan societies have this [autonomous] structure,” she said.

The CUP grew from having 22 councilors across Catalonia in 2007, to having 385 by 2015, while holding 18 mayorships.

The CUP mayor of Berga, Montse Venturós, explained to the Catalan news channel Ara: “Municipalities must become the engine of the Republic, because it is where real and effective changes can be made.”

In Berga, the CUP is pushing for water municipalisation, a fight that is happening across Catalonia. Terrassa became the first Catalan town to reclaim its water supply, supported by local CUP councilors. Another Berga council action is currently challenging a homophobic bishop.

Based on input from locals and participants, CUP councilors are likewise pursuing agendas challenging tourist gentrification (for example in Girona, promoting local government transparency, including in Nord Oriental, resisting fascism (as in the case of Terrassa, and collaborating against healthcare privatization in places like Lleida.

These moves aren’t taking place in a vacuum. As with municipalism everywhere, Catalan municipalists are rising to challenge state power – and seeing the results in the form of Spanish state repression. Spain frequently outlaws socially progressive actions from municipal and regional governments. For instance, in 2011, the government in Madrid altered the constitution to legally force public bodies to prioritize debt repayments. Recently, the state has also severely restricted the right to protest. Austerity driving authoritarian measures has global echoes, but the shift is amplified in Spain.

## **Rupturing From Spain – And Capitalism**

Spain’s reaction to the 2017 referendum “has some resemblance to Franco’s fascism. This is because the connections between the two forms of government were never wholly severed,” and it’s why Spain is still considered “postfascist”, write Ignasi Bernat and David Whyte, the co-editors of “Building a New Catalonia: Self-determination and Emancipation.

This collection of essays is essential to explore where Catalan independence came from and where it is going. The recent Catalan radical independence surge connects to the 15M squares

movement of 2011, when millions of people occupied Spain's squares and galvanized a broader Spanish municipalist takeover of councils across the country in 2015.

The book lays out how Catalans have become the scapegoats for the Spanish state, in a similar way that migrants have been demonized worldwide in the age of austerity. It dispels the international myth that Catalan independence is a movement primarily driven by economic greed or nationalism.

Contributor Oscar Simón argues in the book that Catalan independence can only challenge state power by adopting the 15M movement's demands. In 2018, Simón told me: "Catalan fascists exist, but only a few. If they come to demonstrations they are expelled. The Far Right Catalonia Party only got 56 votes in the last election. It is not like the pro-unionist demonstrations, where they find the space to grow."

The book makes it clear that radical municipalism is central to gaining radical independence for the region. The broader project is to recover sovereignty – from food to water to housing – while smashing patriarchy and overcoming the death-spiral of financialization. These fights continue to this day in Catalonia, where neighborhood independence assemblies that organized the referendum are now galvanizing people to join cooperatives and take their money away from corporations that support and benefit from the status quo.

The effort continues to create a people-led constitution and create a bottom-up rebel republic. Exiled former CUP MP Anna Gabriel wrote: "Winning therefore means recovering lost sovereignties and control over resources and strategic sectors, building an international order based on peace, solidarity, justice, socialism, feminism, environmentalism and anti-militarism... Victory is about demonstrating that within the EU there are still options to revolutionize consciousness for the benefit of life, of the working classes and of the basic material needs of social majorities. And that this can only be done by fighting against identity based, racist and ethnocentric approaches, by opening up borders to people seeking refuge, by accepting to live with less, so everyone can live with more."

## **Rebel Cities 25: Barcelona En Comú Reclaims the City and Reimagines the World (Barcelona, Spain)**

“Tourism is making Barcelona’s housing too expensive for locals. Loud parties, people defecating in the streets and disturbances are minor problems, compared to rising rents,” said David Castro, an activist with Barcelona En Comú (Barcelona In Common), speaking in 2017. “Tourism eats cities, like in London or San Francisco.”

That year, En Comú, the political party that governs Spain’s second largest city, introduced a plan – abbreviated as PEUAT – to tackle tourism. The party, which was formed by activists and residents to upend traditional local elections, has run the city since 2015.

“This is novel, a direct action to seriously reduce tourism,” Castro explained.

Globally, tourism often goes unquestioned. Business as usual means property generates profit. But, “PEUAT is a zoning plan, creating different rules for opening hotels and tourist apartments,” Kate Shea-Baird, from En Comú’s governing executive, told me in an interview here last year.

Today, Barcelona promotes de-growth in the city center while encouraging limited tourist growth in the city’s periphery. En Comú expected resistance to its plan, especially from opposition parties.

Instead, neighbourhood housing movements pushed the council to expand the de-growth zone. The result: “PEUAT became even more ambitious than we hoped,” said Shea-Baird.

### **Reclaiming the City, Barrio by Barrio**

En Comú’s new politics emphasizes words like “neighbours”. I asked En Comú participant Federico Gatti why “neighbors” often replaces “citizens” – or more neoliberal words like “consumers” and “taxpayers.”

“You can be a neighbour without citizenship, as I was,” said Gatti, a native-born Argentinian. “The way we relate breaks the anti-political narrative of neoliberalism. Politics is beautiful: You do it whether you like it or not. When a baby cries it makes a demand. That’s politics. We must recover politics for people.”

Some of Barcelona’s most radical innovations have recovered homes for neighbours and neighbourhoods. The council has increasingly fined property speculators – most recently vulture funds – for keeping properties empty.

Today, social housing is being built, including in the former prison Modelo, in places once destined for luxury flats. With an expanded housing budget, the council is able to intervene to reduce evictions and support victims of gentrification.

But regenerating neighbourhoods goes beyond retaining neighbours. “Superblocks” are being rolled out – zones where people and bikes roam freely and cars are discouraged, promoting a more environmental and people-friendly city.

More broadly, neighbourhoods in Barcelona are becoming a key building block for participatory democracy. Neighbours regularly meet in public assemblies. En Comú crowd-sources proposals through an online digital platform and assemblies where popular ideas are pushed on city hall.

I attended an assembly last year in Poble Nou, where Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau visited to hear concerns, particularly ones focused on tourism and housing.

Neighbour input is changing things at the micro-level – like making the square in which I interviewed Castro more resident-friendly – and promoting city-wide projects co-formulated with the population through online mechanisms.

For instance, the public vocally backed Barcelona’s plans to municipalize its water services and create a municipal energy company. Broad participation has been at the core of En Comú since it formed through a convergence of activist groups.

## **“La Nueva Política”**

Other cities have formed similar political confluences that took over city halls across Spain in 2015. And this coming Sunday’s election, on May 26, will test the “new politics” of the region. Working as a decentralized network, Barcelona and Madrid are leading a charge against the Spanish and European anti-migrant policies that have caused thousands to drown in the Mediterranean, with many more detained without trial.

The new politics also includes cities limiting the salaries and perks for politicians and civil servants. In Madrid, the “sustainability of life” has become one of the council’s core values through its “Ciudad de los Cuidados” (City of the Citizens) initiative.

The Spanish capital has also re-municipalized funeral services and increased public spending while lowering debt. The Andalusian city of Cadiz has meanwhile made its own leaps into green municipalism, and many councils, like Zaragoza’s, have introduced participatory budgeting.

But the new politics also faces resistance from the Spanish state. This has been especially clear in Madrid, where Mayor Manuela Carmena has lacked the courage to defy austerity imposed from a strong conservative opposition and central government. Instead, in 2017, she sacked her finance minister, Carlos Sánchez Mato, who wanted to go further with progressive reforms. Challenging state power – and receiving pushback against their efforts – is unavoidable for radical municipalists.

One answer to the state response has been to rupture the status quo, as in the case of the radical independence municipalists of Catalonia – profiled here last week – who will also be vying for power in elections this Sunday.

Barcelona En Comú’s approach to state power has three aspects. One, it defies the government, for instance by challenging immigration policies. Second, it allies with the Spanish center-left Podemos party, which seeks to strengthen its national power (though Podemos has failed to live up to its democratic origins and holds an uncomfortable middle ground on the issue of Catalan independence.) En Comú’s third stand – and arguably its most ambitious – is to reclaim the world, city by city.

## Fearless Cities

“To win Barcelona for the common good, we need other people around the world to act in the same way: to come together with their neighbours, to imagine alternatives for their town or city, and to start to build them from the bottom up. This is just the beginning,” writes Gerardo Pisarello in his introduction to “Fearless Cities,” a new book about the growing global municipalist movement.

Published earlier this year, the work is an essential handbook for taking back cities. It features themes from fighting fascism to promoting public transport, from protecting public space and other urban commons to creating radical democracy.

The chapters often provide a mini-manifesto. On enabling radical democracy, one message is that any single democratic tool might exclude some people, so it therefore aims to create a “participatory ecosystem”. The book stresses that these are ideas to adapt – they are not a uniform blueprint – as municipalism isn’t a one size-fits-all model.

En Comú started Fearless Cities with a convergence in 2017 that has since spread across continents. Now, Fearless Cities, as both book and network, shares tactics for people everywhere who seek to win back their city – from building a political confluence and crowd-funding to creating a code of ethics and employing a “technopolitics” to communicate seamlessly on-and-offline.

Fearless Cities stresses taking action: seizing the low hanging fruit as you harvest higher. One central theme is feminizing politics. Each chapter gives activists practical tips on how to dismantle patriarchy, including an excellent guide – by Marea Feminista of A Coruña – on ways to stop male voices from drowning out everyone else.

In the Spanish context, feminizing politics has shown itself particularly strong, featuring huge women’s marches and strikes. The movement is trying to break the post-Franco legacy, which entails a struggle to overcome gendered violence and sexism that is more entrenched than in most countries of the global north.

This book – like this series, on Rebel Cities – shows a radical municipalist world in the making, and explains how it is being created today. Concluding the book, Ada Colau, Barcelona’s progressive mayor, reflects on the first Fearless Cities convergence from two years ago.

“It was a public proclamation, a cry to the heavens that we wanted, together, to move towards a better future,” she writes.

“In a brave, united voice, we said loud and clear that we wanted to change the world, working at the local level through concrete actions and policies that not only improve people’s lives, but also show that there is an alternative, and that politics should work for the many and put people at the center.”



# **Rebel Cities 26: These Community Wind Farms in Denmark and Scotland are Decentralising Power to the People (Denmark and Scotland)**

Green municipalism offers solutions to the escalating climate catastrophe, pathways that both complement and could extend the Green New Deal being proposed by progressives in the UK Labour and US Democratic parties. A decentralised wind power revolution is already happening in Denmark and Scotland, where community ownership is delivering power to the people.

## **Middelgrunden and Denmark's Revolution**

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century rolled in, Denmark created the world's largest offshore wind farm: Middelgrunden. It consisted of 20 turbines, located four kilometers from Copenhagen, with a capacity of over 40 Megawatts. Since 2001, Middelgrunden has supplied approximately 4 percent of the Danish capital's energy needs.

More impressively, Danish people co-created this wind farm. Ten of the 20 turbines are owned by a cooperative, while Ørsted, Denmark's largest energy company, owns the other 10. "If you own shares in a project, when you look over at that turbine, with each turn of the blades, that's cash to you," local resident and energy expert Justin Gerdes told the Green Economy Coalition.

More than 50,000 people participated in the project, giving input into the sea wind farm's location and design. Another 8,500 Danes invested directly and are now making a 7 percent return on their investments. Under consideration are plans to upgrade Middelgrunden with larger turbines that will help it generate even more power in the years to come.

Broad public involvement overcomes the negative spin about wind energy happening elsewhere across the world. I heard similar positive sentiments visiting other wind farms in Denmark, a country that harnesses the most wind power for electricity anywhere in the world. In 2017, it re-broke its own previous world record, taking 43 percent of its electrical needs from the wind.

## **The Figure Continues to Spin Upwards**

Denmark's success is built on a number of factors. National policy has supported green municipalism. Since the 1970s oil shock, the country realised it needed to reduce its dependency on fossil fuel imports. Nuclear was originally mooted, but activists and engineers innovated to show how communally-owned wind meant they did not need dangerous nuclear fusion.

The government supported green innovation with tax breaks that incentivised households to buy into wind cooperatives. By 2001, 86 percent of wind energy came from cooperatives, which

only dropped as multinationals like Ørsted realised the powerful potential and jumped into the market.

Three other ways that Denmark created communal wind was giving wind developments the right to connect and sell energy to the grid – both requiring that the electricity be bought, and guaranteeing a good price. In 2011, it established a law that all new wind must include 20 percent community ownership.

With support like that, no wonder wind power is so popular in Denmark.

## **The Case in Scotland**

Across the North Sea, Scotland also showcases how communities can harness wind power to great effect. On the small and remote Western island of Tiree, in the inner Hebrides, wind is so popular they named their wind turbine “Tilley”. It generates power for 3,650 homes annually, far more than the 700 residents need, making the island a net energy exporter.

Built in 2010, Tilley is organised by a community trust run through local participation; the profits make the island self sustaining, for instance, by enabling reinvestment back into the community for elderly care, subsidising local shops and other charity projects.

This reverses the exodus of people from the Highlands and Islands, which is a problem there as it is in rural areas the world over.

Yet Tilley is hardly an exception. Like Denmark, wind farms are in bloom across Scotland. In 2017, Scotland produced 69 percent of its electrical energy needs from renewables. These numbers too keep rising.

Gigha, a small inner Hebrides island, is another outstanding example. In 2004, islanders purchased and installed three second-hand wind turbines, which they named the Dancing Ladies. It was the first Scottish community-owned wind farm to connect to the national grid. The profits are ploughed back into the community, like on Tiree. One important part of this story is that residents of Gigha, like Tiree, clubbed together to buy the island collectively.

Communities buying the islands they live on, then building community wind farms on them, has happened across Scotland’s Western isles. For instance, The isle of Eigg co-bought in 1997 from its previous feudal overlords. Since then the population has risen from 65 to 100 and its independence on solar, wind and water power makes the island self sufficient. Lewis, the largest Scottish island, is now more co-owned than it is owned by the remaining few large landowners.

The island of Lewis also demonstrates the battle between community wind power and big energy companies as they try to reap the spoils. In Tolsta, east Lewis, the community has successfully built a wind farm that is investing money back into training and education for locals and minor housing repairs.

All these moves are breathing life back into Lewis. But the big, nearby French energy firm, EDF, is leading a plan to build a far bigger wind farm, which has been criticised as a land-and-power-grab as most of the energy and profits are expected to go offshore, benefitting those far beyond Lewis and its locals.

If we look at Scotland as a case study, it offers other lessons to the world, too. For instance, it has banned fracking and set admirable climate targets compared to many other nations. But even Scotland needs to go further. For instance, its government voted down calling the escalating climate crisis what it is. Its economy relies on oil.

But like the Danes, it is again municipalism in Scotland that is blazing the brightest trails.

Ten miles to the North of Scotland's mainland, the Orkney island chain now generates 120 percent of its people's energy needs through community-owned renewables. It almost does not know what to do with all the energy, and the island is currently leading research into how to create carbon neutral fuel by splitting water into hydrogen, using an electrolyser based on Orkney's Eday. The plan is to drive the Orkney ferry with the fuel – with the first ferry set to sail carbon-free in 2021.

Communities co-creating their energy needs – and even co-owning the land – then managing them through participative democracy is inherently municipalist: green municipalist. It is common sense. Green municipalism does not only need to be restricted to the wind-battered Nordic coastal fringes.

Communities can generate their own energy from remote independent island grids to urban solar cooperatives, using municipal buildings to co-harness renewable energy. Working examples flourish, from London's Brixton Energy solar cooperative to Toronto's Wind Share across the ocean, Canada's first wind power cooperative; and from Indian farmers getting their water pumped by a solar powered water cooperative in Gujarat, to Argentina where 16 percent of its electrical energy is created by energy cooperatives.

The future is bright for wind and renewables just about everywhere. Now it's a matter of people, and communities, recognizing and acting on that potential.

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